Forty Seven Days And Counting
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Forty Seven Days And Counting

by lionfjsh

Summary

It takes forty seven days for Shuichi to call him. He counted.

Day One

Shuichi sighed, pushing open the door to his friend's coffee shop. He was there almost daily, keeping to himself in the back corner, partially hidden away from the rest of the people inside. He liked to work on his cases there. It was much cosier than his cramped office, and he liked to support his friend, Kaede's, business. He ordered so much coffee every day, she often joked that he alone could keep it on its feet.

"Good morning!"

"Good m-" Shuichi stopped, eyes snapping up to the person at the counter. Kaede didn't have very many employees. In fact, it was usually only her, Makoto, and a girl named Maki, who was friends with Kaede.

However, a new voice had greeted him that day. A new person was standing behind the counter. He was grinning, dark purple hair falling into his face a little bit. He looked young, maybe a university student? Kaede was standing next to him, giving Shuichi a smile.

"Good morning," Shuichi said, glancing at Kaede for explanation.

"This is Kokichi Ouma," she introduced. "He's my newest employee!" She had a giant smile on her face, as if she were really excited about picking up someone else to work for her.

"It's nice to meet you, Ouma," Shuichi said politely.

"Yeah, you too, Blueberry!" Ouma said with a wink.

"Saihara."

"Gesundheit."

"No, my name," Shuichi sighed. "It's Saihara. Shuichi."

"Saihara-kun is my very best customer," Kaede said with a giggle. "He basically lives here. You can expect to see him every day. All day every day."

"Jeez Blueberry-chan, do you have a life?" Kokichi asked.

Shuichi only stared at him. He hadn't gotten enough sleep or coffee to

properly form the snarky response he wished he could. Instead, he settled for hazily examining Kokichi's big, purple eyes, which were staring right back at him.

"Ahaha… He's just joking," Kaede said nervously. "I'll get you a coffee."

"Thanks," Shuichi mumbled, slinking off to his secluded alcove. He sank down into the squishy armchair and set his bag on the floor. Pulling out his laptop, he sighed, preparing to set to work on his latest case.

"Sorry about him," Kaede said, setting Shuichi's coffee down on the table in front of him and taking a seat in a chair across from him. "I know he's a little bit of a handful, but he seemed so desperate when he showed up here, I couldn't turn him down."

"You're too nice," Shuichi mumbled, picking up the coffee.

"I mean, I've gotta give him a chance, right?" she pressed on. "How bad could he possibly be?"

"No, you're right," he sighed. "I'm sure it'll be fine. You really know how to bring the best out of people, after all."

"Aww, now *you're* the one being too nice," Kaede said with a laugh. "I'll let you get to work. Let me know if you need anything."

"Thanks, Kaede," Shuichi said, but his focus was already on the screen in front of him.

The case he had picked up wasn't exactly a difficult one. He assumed he'd have it solved and closed by the end of the day. Assuming, that is, that nobody bothered him. And nobody usually did. Most of Kaede's customers were regulars, either dropping by for a drink every morning or staying for a while like he did.

The ones that stayed were almost all old ladies that knew Kaede from some piano thing she used to do. Sometimes they'd read, sometimes they'd knit, sometimes they'd try something new like writing or painting. They chatted amongst themselves, but rarely spoke to Shuichi. They were on friendly terms, of course, but they knew he was busy, and he had work to do.

Occasionally, a few university students would hunker in and study for a while, but none of them ever kept coming for more than a week or

so. He wasn't sure where they went. He never bothered to find out. It's not like he was going to leave with them, so it didn't interest him at all.

Kyoko Kirigiri didn't come in every day, but she did come in frequently. As expected, seeing as she was friends with Makoto. Shuichi and Kyoko tended to avoid each other. It wasn't that Shuichi necessarily had a *problem* with her. But Shuichi wasn't on very good terms with the police force for which she worked, so their interactions were kept to a minimum.

The only other people he saw regularly were the employees. Kaede was there all day, of course, and Makoto worked in the afternoons and evenings. Kaede's other friend, Maki, worked the late shift, often starting after Shuichi left for the day. However, she spent most days up in the loft, working hard on *something* , though he never bothered to ask what. She left every once in a while, and one time a really loud boy came to visit her. He hadn't been back since.

In any case, Shuichi was, for the most part, left alone. And he liked it that way. He was perfectly content to settle down into that chair and work through cases from dawn until dusk. By the end of the day, there was usually a good stack of coffee cups on the table, papers scattered around with neatly written notes scrawled over them.

But Kokichi was not going to let him have that luxury.

Shuichi had just gotten focused, settling in and reviewing the evidence he'd been presented with for his case. It was a pretty hefty amount, nothing to sneeze at, but it would take a good deal of thinking. He picked up the case summary once more to look over that as well, trying to pick a place to start.

He was interrupted by none other than Kokichi himself plopping down in the chair Kaede had been in not ten minutes before. Shuichi looked up at him, raising an eyebrow inquisitively, but Kokichi only stared at him with a smile. After watching him for a few more moments, Shuichi went back to his work, choosing to ignore him.

"So are you *really* here all day every day?" Kokichi asked, interrupting Shuichi again.

Shuichi sighed, looking up from his laptop. "Not necessarily," he said. "Occasionally I stay in the office while I work. Sometimes I have meetings with clients. Why?"

“Because you’d *really* have to be some sort of loser to spend all day here,” Kokichi snickered.

“Are you saying it’s not a nice coffee shop?” Shuichi asked. He narrowed his eyes. It felt petty, but if Kokichi was insulting Kaede’s hard work…

“Nope!” he exclaimed, seemingly unaffected by Shuichi’s glare. “Not at all. But the only people that stick around here all the time are old ladies. Are you an old lady, Shumai?”

“S-Shumai…?” Shuichi mumbled. First blueberries and then dumplings? “And no, I’m not. Clearly.”

“Well then, you’ve gotta be a loser!” Kokichi proclaimed. Shuichi didn’t respond, so he continued. “The only other people here are old ladies with nothing better to do. So like, what’s that make you, huh? At least they have friends! Nishishi!”

“I have friends…” Shuichi mumbled, glaring off to the side.

“Oh yeah? Name one other than Akamatsu-chan.”

Shuichi turned his glare towards Kokichi. He was regarding him smugly, a self satisfied smirk on his face. Shuichi knew he shouldn’t engage the boy, but found himself desperately trying to think of another friend despite that. To his horror, he couldn’t really think of anybody.

“You and Harumaki are both losers,” Kokichi sighed, standing up again. He stretched his arms above his head, yawning obnoxiously as he did so. “I’ll getcha another coffee then, toaster waffle.”

“That wasn’t even clever,” Shuichi sighed to himself, though he appreciated the thought. He hadn’t realised he’d run out of coffee already until Kokichi had mentioned it. He did seem to be rather observant, if not flippant with a blatant disregard for others.

Shuichi cracked open his laptop again, set on getting into his case. He’d already been delayed long enough. Though it was simple, it wasn’t necessarily pleasant. Every once in a while he got hired to find missing pets, and it was a welcome relief, but this case wasn’t one of them. Much more in line with his usual jobs, it was a homicide.

Again, a relatively simple one. He already had a pretty clear suspect. The victim’s ex boyfriend, someone with a violent criminal record. If

he recalled correctly, a knife he owned was found at the scene of the crime. It certainly wasn't enough evidence to convict him. Shuichi needed to go over everything in detail, make sure it really had been him. Piece together what he'd done and when. Collect enough evidence to put someone behind bars. It wasn't often that he got a case as easy as that.

True to his word, Kokichi returned a few minutes later with another cup of coffee. He set in front of Shuichi wordlessly, and the latter mumbled out a 'thanks' as he did so. Without looking up from the case summary, Shuichi grabbed the cup of coffee and took a sip, immediately recoiling at the sweet taste.

"Ah, Ouma-kun," Shuichi called, moving to stand up only to see Kokichi still standing right in front of him, grinning from ear to ear. Shuichi sighed. "I only take my coffee black," he said.

"What?!" Ouma cried. "But that's so boring!" He frowned, staring at the ground to his left. "And I made that one special for you…"

Shuichi winced, feeling a little bad. "I-I didn't know," he said softly. "I'm sorry, I'll drink it. Thank you..."

"Good!" he exclaimed. He'd perked up immediately, almost as if his disappointment had been fake. "I made that one just how I like my coffee. I hope you like it, Saihara-chan~"

Shuichi was left staring after him as he pranced away, confused and a little flustered. It had been the first time Kokichi had called him by his actual name, and it made his heart clench a little. Not that he'd ever admit that.

He looked down at the coffee disdainfully. He'd drink it, of course, but he wasn't necessarily looking forward to it. Kokichi seemed childish, and judging by the sip he'd just had, the coffee was probably… hardly any coffee at all. Taking another sip, he sighed. It wasn't *awful* , but he much preferred something with a little (or a lot) less milk.

"So what exactly does he *do* ?" Kokichi asked Kaede. The two were standing behind the counter again, Kokichi leaning up against the side of it as they waited for customers.

"He's a private investigator," Kaede told him.

"Really?!" Kokichi cried, trying to stifle a laugh. "You mean like those

guys on TV that tell you to call them if you or your loved one have suffered from mesothelioma?!"

Kaede laughed. Kokichi noted that even her laugh sounded musical. He couldn't help but wonder why she'd stopped playing the piano. It was clear that she loved it, so why'd she bother to open up a coffee shop? One that wasn't even very successful, to boot.

"Not exactly," Kaede told him, dragging Kokichi back into the present conversation. "He actually handles a lot of murder cases."

"Murder…?" Kokichi glanced over across the shop, as if he could see around the corner where Shuichi was sitting.

"Mhmm!" Kaede said. "People come to him when they can't rely on the police, mostly. Whether that's with a cold case, or one that the police just don't take seriously."

"And does he solve them?" Kokichi asked, suddenly very interested in him. Maybe Shuichi wasn't so much of a loser after all.

"Always," she said with a smile. "He hasn't left a case unsolved yet."

"Don't the police get upset?" Kokichi frowned, standing up straighter.

"Why don't you ask him yourself?" Kaede suggested. She knew Shuichi was busy, but Kokichi seemed genuinely interested. And she knew more than anybody that Shuichi could use another friend.

"Maybe later," Kokichi said with a shrug. "He's so lame, I bet he'd bore me to death!" he said with a laugh. Kaede rolled her eyes with a smile. Despite what he said, she was sure he was truly just being considerate of Shuichi's job. Kokichi was a lot nicer than he let on.

"Right. Well in that case, would you grind some more coffee for me?"

"Yes, ma'am!" Kokichi exclaimed, giving her a salute.

He quickly headed into the back room, poking around until he'd found some coffee beans. He busied himself with the mindless task as he let his thoughts wander back to Shuichi, the loud sound of the coffee grinder providing white noise.

He couldn't put his finger on exactly why, but Shuichi was interesting to Kokichi. Something about him made him want to learn more. And it didn't hurt that he was a really, *really* pretty boy. Kokichi chewed

on his lip as he dumped the ground beans into a container. He probably had a girlfriend, right? The thought made his stomach twist.

“Tch,” he mumbled, refilling the grinder. Why would he care? It’s not like he was looking to date him, right?

Oh, but how fun that might be…!

Kokichi smiled to himself. It was settled. No matter how long he had to try, he was going to get Shuichi Saihara to go on a date with him. It’s not that he necessarily had a crush on the boy, but the idea sounded entertaining to him. Something to keep him from getting bored in that quiet little coffee shop. Like a game! He knew it was probably a dick move to play with someone's feelings like that, but he highly doubted he'd be able to get Shuichi to agree anyways.

...And besides, being a dick was kind of his signature style, wasn't it?

Kokichi’s thoughts were interrupted by Kaede, who had poked her head in the door. “Hey, Ouma-kun? I’ve gotta run out really quickly. Would you keep an eye on the shop for me? It’ll just be like ten minutes.”

“You got it, boss lady!” he said, grinning at her.

“Thanks, you’re the best,” she sighed, retreating again.

Kokichi closed the containers he’d opened, setting them back on the shelves he’d gotten them from. He unplugged the coffee grinder and put that away as well. He sighed. Kaede was incredibly nice, and it was more than extremely generous of her to allow him to work there. He didn’t want to mess it up. Not too many people were very keen on offering him a job with his extensive (albeit mild) criminal record, so he really was shit out of luck if he got fired. And besides that... He didn't want to ruin things for Kaede.

“Alright, just a few minutes!” Kaede insisted as Kokichi emerged from the back.

She was practically halfway out the door already. Whatever it was she was doing must have been pretty urgent. Kokichi hoped everything was okay. She still looked as cheerful as ever, but that easily could have been a facade. He would know, he was basically the best at covering up his feelings with a dumb, goofy grin, after all.

“See ya!” he called, though it was mostly to himself. By the time he’d

said it, she was out the door and walking down the street.

Kokichi watched her as she disappeared from view, checking to make sure she wasn't coming back. He wasn't breaking the rules or anything. He just didn't want her to know about his secret plan to steal Shuichi's heart!

He looked at the shelves on the wall behind the counter, trying to decide which drink to bring Shuichi next. Kaede had said he never ordered anything except black coffee. Kokichi thought that was incredibly boring, so he decided he'd have to try to spice things up for him.

Shuichi clearly hadn't liked what he'd made him the last time, so he decided to make something less sweet. He settled for some green tea that he'd seen Kaede make for herself earlier. He'd been able to smell it, and he thought Shuichi might like that instead, seeing as it was more bitter than the drink he'd made earlier, which was, admittedly, mostly milk.

Kokichi wasted no time in brewing the tea, waiting impatiently for it to steep as he stared at it. He was sure Kaede would have said, 'Watched cookies never bake!' or something like that, but there wasn't really anything else he could do. After a few minutes of watching colour slowly seep into the water in the cup, he decided it was probably good enough.

Grabbing the paper cup, Kokichi snuck around the counter. He watched the tea carefully, making sure not to spill it, as he made his way towards the back of the shop. Shuichi was sitting in the same place he'd left him, though an abundance of papers were now scattered around him on the table and the arms of the chair. Kokichi noticed that he'd finished the rest of the coffee, despite having clearly disliked it. Was Shuichi just that kind of person…?

"Hey, Blueberry!" Kokichi called.

Shuichi looked up from a document he was scrutinising, meeting Kokichi's gaze. He sat up a little, setting the document on the table in front of him. He'd put on a pair of glasses, probably to read, and Kokichi found himself thinking he looked like a big huge nerd. A really cute, attractive nerd… But a nerd all the same.

"I brought you some tea!" Kokichi exclaimed, quickly recovering. He was going to have to be careful. Shuichi was a detective, after all. He'd probably see through his usual lies and cover ups easier than

most people.

“Tea?” Shuichi asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yup!” Kokichi confirmed, popping the P at the end. He set the cup down on the single clear spot on the table and plopped himself down in the other chair again.

Shuichi watched him for a moment. He was examining the documents on the desk, eyes flicking all over the place as he took in whatever he could. It wasn’t necessarily a problem. Confidentiality was important, but Shuichi didn’t currently have anything out that was to be kept from the public eye.

He reached over and picked up the tea, taking a sip of it. He wasn’t opposed to drinking tea. He certainly liked it more than whatever Kokichi had given him earlier. It was green tea, the one that Kaede liked, he noted. He wasn’t sure if Kokichi had done that intentionally, but Shuichi found himself smiling about it anyways.

“So Akamatsu-chan said you’re like some super cool detective guy, yeah?” Kokichi said, breaking the silence.

“I don’t know that I’d call myself a super cool detective,” Shuichi said with a nervous laugh. “I’m just a small time private investigator.”

“But she said you’ve cracked cold cases!” Kokichi insisted. “A single guy beating the police force? That’s pretty impressive, Shumai.”

“I… Thank you…” Shuichi said quietly, his gaze trained on the paper in front of him. He was embarrassed that Kaede had told him that, but even more embarrassed that he’d brought it up. He was humble, almost to a fault, so said Kaede, and he didn’t want to boast about it.

“But that’s, like, crazy!” Kokichi continued. “The police must *hate* you, right? That they keep getting beat out by one loser guy that sits around in a coffee shop?”

Shuichi sighed, closing his eyes and slumping back into the chair. “Are you always like this?” he asked.

“Like what?” Kokichi replied. He looked at Shuichi with side eyes, tilting his head to the side like an innocent puppy.

“So… So crass?” Shuichi said.

“Oh, you know.” Kokichi gave him a wink. Shuichi frowned.

“Um, no, actually, I don’t,” he said. “That’s why I a-”

“And you never even answered my question!” Kokichi interrupted. “Don’t the police like hate your guts?”

“They didn’t used to,” Shuichi said. He took off his glasses, setting them on the table on top of a few papers. “They wanted me to join them for a while.”

“Why didn’t you?” Kokichi asked.

Shuichi looked over to him. The way he was draped across the chair sideways made it seem like he was still just teasing him, but his voice conveyed genuine interest. “I don’t like their rules,” he said simply.

“Okay, edgelord,” Kokichi scoffed. “As if you could be any sort of rebel.”

“Well, I was nearly expelled in high school,” Shuichi said with a shrug.

“You what.”

“I was investigating the principal,” he continued. “He had committed some pretty serious crimes, but nobody had enough evidence to back it up. It didn’t sit right with me, so I looked into it. I was suspended a few times, and they were going to expel me as well.”

“But then you dropped the truth on them and shocked them all!” Kokichi guessed, holding a finger up. He looked excited.

“More or less,” Shuichi said with a shrug.

“Woowww,” Kokichi cooed. “We got a real vigilante here, huh? A real live Akira Kurusu, *huh?* ”

“A real live… who?”

“Oh my *god* , Shumai, do you not play video games?” Kokichi groaned. “How old are you? Fifty?”

“Twenty four.”

“Twenty four?! What is wrong with you!” Kokichi sat up in his chair, looking Shuichi dead in the eye. “You mean to tell me you’re a real

ass Millennial that doesn't play video games?!"

"Is… there a problem with that?" Shuichi asked. He wasn't sure why Kokichi was so shocked. He was pretty sure Kaede didn't play them either. Was it really that big of a deal? Maybe Kokichi was younger than he thought…

"Of course there is!" Kokichi cried. He flopped backwards again, slumping down so that only his neck and head rested against the back of the chair. Shuichi thought it looked rather uncomfortable.

"I'm… sorry?" He didn't really know how he was supposed to respond to that.

"So what do you even do with your free time?" Kokichi asked. "Do you even have free time? I bet you don't have free time. I bet you just go home and sleep. Or work more? You seem like the workaholic type, but-"

Shuichi stared at him as he continued to ramble, a blank expression on his face. He didn't know what to think. Should he be offended? Should he try to answer his questions? Should he just go back to work? With the way he was going on and on, Shuichi suspected he probably wouldn't notice if he just started ignoring him.

"Hello? Shumai? Earth to Saihara-chan!"

Or perhaps he already had been ignoring him.

"Sorry," Shuichi mumbled. "Did… Were you saying something?"

"Yeah! I was sayin' you should come over to my place sometime and play something with me!" he exclaimed. "Something easy, like Mario Kart." He snickered at the thought of Shuichi totally getting his ass kicked.

"Ah, I…" Shuichi paused. He would honestly rather perish than spend more time with Kokichi than whatever was necessary in the day time, but he didn't want to hurt his feelings. "I'm sorry, Ouma-kun, but I'm really busy. It's like you said, I work most of the time. Especially with business picking up lately…"

Kokichi pouted. He knew that was just Shuichi's way of saying 'absolutely not'. But, he supposed that would have been too easy anyways. And would that have even counted as a date? Probably not. "Maybe you should hire some employees then, Mr. Detective Man," he

grumbled. He kicked his legs up over the armrest, laying his head back on the other one and crossing his arms.

“I work alone,” Shuichi told him. He slipped his glasses back on and picked up the paper he’d been reading before Kokichi had interrupted him.

“Seriously?” Kokichi said, clearly unamused. “Be careful or you'll cut yourself on that edge . That was terrible, Blueberry-chan.”

Shuichi hummed, attempting to tune him out as he continued to read the same sentence over and over and over again, unable to focus. He wasn’t usually so scatterbrained. Was it Kokichi’s fault?

“But taking on all that work by yourself must be tiresome, right?” Kokichi continued. Either he didn’t notice that Shuichi was trying to get back to work, or he didn’t care.

“I manage,” Shuichi said dismissively.

“You do *everything* by yourself? Are you a lawyer too?”

“No.”

“So then what? Are these people just satisfied with an answer? Does nobody want to go to court?”

“They don’t always need to.”

“And what about when they do?” Kokichi had shifted again, sitting on the edge of his chair and leaning over the table towards Shuichi.

“Then I refer them to a lawyer.” Shuichi was still stuck on the same sentence of the document he had been at the beginning of the conversation. He was trying his best to not get distracted by the unwavering gaze Kokichi had set on his face.

“But that lawyer doesn’t work with you? So what, are you guys like pals or something? Go to law school together? I thought you didn’t have any friends.”

Shuichi closed his eyes for a moment, halfheartedly throwing the paper back down onto the table. “You’re the one that assumed I didn’t have any friends,” Shuichi reminded him. “He’s more of an acquaintance anyways. I have faith in his work, and he has faith in mine. We don’t… We don’t like ‘hang out’ or whatever.”

“Ew, never say ‘hang out’ again,” Kokichi said with a grimace. Shuichi gave him an exasperated look. “We may be the same age but you act like some kind of grandpa!” he explained.

Shuichi faltered for a moment. ‘The same age’? So Kokichi *wasn’t* far younger than him. He just looked and acted like it. “What’s wrong?” he asked. “Don’t kids our age say ‘hang out’?”

“Point and case,” Kokichi said, giving him an unamused stare. Shuichi frowned. He still didn’t understand what he’d done wrong. “Alright grandpa, I’ll leave you to your crosswords,” he sighed.

“Thanks,” Shuichi mumbled. He was too sick of him to say anything more.

Kokichi stood up and stretched, raising his arms above his head and yawning dramatically. Shuichi rolled his eyes and picked up the paper for what he hoped would be the final time. Kokichi began to slink away, but paused just as he was about to round the corner.

“Just don’t overwork yourself. Kay, Saihara-chan?”

Shuichi looked up to where he’d been standing, but Kokichi had already disappeared again. He stared at the wall where he’d stopped for a few moments, as if he’d pop back out and say something more. But of course he didn’t. He cast his gaze to the floor. Perhaps Kokichi wasn’t as bad as he made himself seem.

Trying to push the thought aside, Shuichi settled back into working on his case. He hoped Kokichi wouldn’t bother him too much more. Though, as he re-read the autopsy report, he couldn’t help but let his mind wander back to the boy. Why had he come to bring him drinks? Was Kaede busy? Had Kokichi insisted? Was it another one of Kaede’s ploys to get him to have more friends?

He squeezed his eyes shut, running a hand through his hair. It didn’t matter. What mattered was the case in front of him. The case that some incredibly upset parents desperately wanted him to solve. And he had to, if he wanted to be paid. So he forced himself to shut out any remaining thoughts of Kokichi and get back to work.

Kokichi slid behind the counter just as Kaede was walking back through the door. Her cheeks were a bit flushed, but that was probably from the nippy mid-winter air. Kokichi didn’t pay her much attention as he grabbed a napkin from the dispenser on the counter and pulled the pen out from his apron pocket.

“Everything alright while I was gone?” Kaede asked. She quickly joined Kokichi behind the counter and slipped on an apron, setting her purse in the back room.

“Yep,” Kokichi said. It was his turn to be dismissive.

“How was Shuichi?”

“Boring as ever,” Kokichi sighed, hunching over the counter to scribble something on the napkin.

“I see. Are you working on something?” she asked. She didn’t try to look, as she didn’t want to pry.

“It’s nothing~!” Kokichi said with a grin, turning to look at her and shoving the napkin into his pocket. He knew it looked suspicious, and he knew Kaede knew he was up to something, but he wasn’t about to just outright tell her.

“Okay,” she said simply.

Kokichi watched, a little surprised, as she got back to work rearranging the display they had out to make up for the items they’d sold. It wasn’t often that people trusted him enough not to pry about what he was doing. It had startled him. He turned away, trying to hide a smile. Kaede really was something else… Something too good for him.

Kokichi sat down on a stool, resting his chin in his hand, elbow on the counter. He was going to have to get Shuichi to like him somehow. It was pretty obvious that at that moment, Shuichi was mostly just annoyed with him. That had to change.

But how was he supposed to do that? He’d said it himself, Shuichi’s whole personality was basically ‘work’. He didn’t know anything about detective work, other than what he saw on some of those dumb cop dramas his roommate watched in university. He had gotten fairly well acquainted with the law, but he couldn’t start up a conversation with a private investigator by saying, ‘Hey! At this time last year, I was being accused of vandalising the Imperial Palace!’ It *had* been him, of course, but it would be even *worse* to admit *that* .

Maybe he could ask Kaede? He snuck a glance at her. She was holding a bottle of strawberry milk, an extremely serious expression on her face. Kokichi raised an eyebrow. He watched as she went to put it down, shook her head, and then went to put it down again, only

to stand back with it still in her hand. Was it really that important where the last bottle of strawberry milk was? Kaede had weird priorities.

No, he didn't want to rely on Kaede. He'd only known her for a few days, but she seemed like the kind of person that would want to get involved. He was sure her intentions would be great, and she probably *would* be a help, but she might think he was being serious with all of it. He didn't want his ass kicked because she thought he was really in love with Shuichi or something corny like that.

He thought it would be best to leave Shuichi alone for the rest of the day. He *had* seemed rather irritated with him when he'd left him a few minutes earlier. Kokichi felt a *tiny* bit guilty. He *was* trying to work, after all, and he'd only been distracting him. *'It's for his own good,'* Kokichi tried to tell himself.

Sticking to his decision, Kokichi didn't try to strike up conversation again for almost the rest of his shift. Kaede had sent him to go bring him coffee a handful of times, which he delivered quickly and wordlessly. Something different every time, of course. He wasn't *that* respectful.

Shuichi found himself wondering if he'd done something to hurt Kokichi's feelings when the boy delivered him a mocha without a single word. Not even when Shuichi had thanked him did he offer anything more than a nod. He *had* been a little rude to try and ignore him while he was talking to him… But it didn't seem like Kokichi had cared? Maybe he'd misjudged the situation. Or maybe Kaede had just told him to stop bothering him.

In either case, it was admittedly a huge relief that Kokichi was keeping his mouth shut. Shuichi was able to refocus on his case, covering ground and beginning to piece together the puzzle of the homicide. It seemed to be turning out as simple as he'd thought it was.

The autopsy reported the cause of death was blood loss, caused by multiple stab wounds to the abdomen. The knife belonging to the suspect was found at the scene of the crime and was left in the victim's body. The coroner had determined that it had been the object to inflict the fatal wound, making it the murder weapon. That would prove to be an underappreciated piece of evidence if the family was to take the case to court.

The knife belonging to the suspect was the reason he was a suspect in the first place. It had been purchased in his name, and he had admitted it was his as well. A pretty damning piece of evidence in the eyes of most people. It seemed to almost everybody that the case was truly that simple. Shuichi was hired to prove that it *was* that simple. However, he wasn't fully convinced.

One of the reasons Shuichi had chosen to become a private investigator rather than a police detective or a lawyer was because he could search for the truth and declare it so. He didn't have to twist words in order to convince people of a lie. He didn't have to remain unbiased or back off when the police chief told him to. He was going to find the truth and present it to his clients, no matter how much they liked it or not.

By the next time Kokichi had returned, Shuichi felt like he'd taken three steps back. He was even more convinced that the original suspect was not the guilty party. He barely mumbled a 'thanks' as Kokichi set a drink down in front of him. He hadn't paid him any mind until he took a sip and it was cold. He'd brought him iced coffee.

Shuichi blinked, looking around for Kokichi. For him to seem so enthusiastic about talking to him and then suddenly not saying a word was a little strange. He certainly didn't mind the peace and quiet, but he felt even more like he'd done something wrong. He took a break from his case for a few moments, contemplating if he should apologise. After deciding that he would the next time Kokichi came around, he set back to work.

Unfortunately, the next time Kokichi stopped by to bring him another drink, Shuichi had headphones in, listening to a recording of a phone call, his face so close to a paper he couldn't see anything else. He hadn't even noticed Kokichi put the cup down until it was far too late, and the hot chocolate was lukewarm.

Shuichi was fairly certain he could prove the original suspect innocent by the time Kokichi made another appearance. He was in the midst of thinking something through when the boy returned again, setting something down that smelled suspiciously of lemonade.

"Ah, Ouma-kun!" Saihara called, immediately abandoning his train of thought.

"Oh? Does my beloved Saihara-chan want my attention?" he asked,

turning around with a smug smirk on his face.

“I… Your beloved Saihara-chan?” Shuichi echoed with total deadpan look on his face. Perhaps he’d been wrong about hurting Kokichi’s feelings. Maybe it was all just an act to get him to give him attention without provocation.

“Nishishi! You heard me,” Kokichi said with a grin.

Shuichi sighed. Even if that was the case, he still felt bad about how he’d treated the boy earlier. “I just wanted to apologise,” he said quietly, nudging his glasses up his nose a little. “For earlier. I shouldn’t have ignored you like that, it was rude.”

“You’re right! It was!”

…

“Huh?”

“I said you’re right!” Kokichi repeated. “It *was* rude! You said it first, why are you acting so surprised?”

“I… just…” Shuichi struggled to come up with an answer. “Don’t people usually, like, say, ‘it’s okay’ or disagree with you?”

“Well that’s dumb,” Kokichi said. “Because it’s *not* okay. And you *were* being rude. That’s why you apologised, right?”

“That’s- I-” He was right, of course, and it was making Shuichi sound like a jerk.

“Only teasing!” Kokichi said with a snicker. He was back to smiling, folding his hands behind his head in a relaxed manner. “I knew you were busy, so I decided to leave you alone! Besides, I was annoying you on purpose earlier.”

“Now I think *you* owe *me* an apology,” Shuichi sighed, slumping down in his chair. It didn’t seem like he should even try with Kokichi.

“Nope! I don’t think so!” Kokichi disagreed. The smile never left his face. “Now get back to work, you smelly detective!”

Shuichi watched as Kokichi pranced away, happy as ever. He supposed he was glad he hadn’t hurt his feelings or anything, but something about his whole demeanor seemed fake. Overdramatized. Or maybe he really just was that melodramatic…? It was hard to say.

He supposed he'd have all the time in the world to figure it out later.

He was about to get back to work when he realised that Kokichi had called him smelly. With a frown, he sniffed the sleeve of his shirt. He'd just washed it the night before, and he'd showered that morning, she he shouldn't have smelled bad. Concluding that Kokichi had just said that to get under his skin, he settled back into his chair to continue his investigation where he'd left off.

Shuichi was quickly finding that the more he investigated the case, the less sure he was about the culprit. Things began to unravel like a murder mystery thriller in front of him, taking twists and turns he hadn't expected in the slightest. He was surprised at how well thought out and executed the murder had been. Not what he thought would come of some simple couple wanting him to tell them what happened to their daughter.

He was so absorbed in following a trail, that he almost didn't notice Kokichi sitting down across from him again. He honestly probably would have ignored him, had it not been for Kokichi speaking up after a few moments.

"I'm off for the day now, Saihara-chan," he said in his usual sing-song voice. "Is my darling detective going to miss me?"

"No," Shuichi said bluntly. He looked from one of his documents to another, and then back to the first, but didn't spare a glance at Kokichi.

"No?!" he cried. "You wound me!" He gripped his chest, feigning pain before standing back up. "Whatever! Not like I care about a stinky loser like you anyways~" he teased. "I just came by to bring you your last drink. Sayonara, Saihara!"

Shuichi looked up to thank him, but Kokichi was already halfway across the coffee shop again. He watched as the boy disappeared from sight, the wall that blocked the alcove in obscuring his view.

He turned back to the table, glancing at the drink Kokichi had brought him. He raised an eyebrow when he caught sight of it. Reaching out to grab it, he took a hesitant sip and was pleasantly surprised. It seemed that Kokichi had decided to have mercy on him at the end of his shift and had brought him black coffee.

Shuichi's head turned towards the door as he heard it creak open, the little chime Kaede had put on it jingling as it did so. He only caught

the back of Kokichi's head as he walked out, the door swinging shut behind him again. His gaze lingered, a small subconscious part of him wishing that Kokichi would walk back in so he could properly thank him. But after a few minutes, he looked back towards his work.

He was about to get back into it when he noticed something written on the side of the white disposable cup. He contemplated ignoring it, but his natural curiosity got the better of him. He reached over and rotated the cup a bit, revealing a set of numbers hastily scrawled onto the side - Kokichi's phone number.

Shuichi wasn't quite sure how he was supposed to respond.

Or rather, he wasn't quite sure how he *wanted* to respond. Obviously the goal Kokichi had been aiming for was a call from Shuichi, but Shuichi was unfortunately not too keen on indulging him. With a roll of his eyes, he simply set the cup back down on the table, intent on ignoring it for the rest of the day.

Shuichi continued to make a lot of forward progress on his case throughout the day. However, despite that, he seemed to be getting farther and farther away from an answer. It was frustrating to him. Every new development felt… almost staged. Almost planned. Like some sort of drama on TV.

By the time he began to pack up his stuff for the night, Maki had already emerged from the loft to start her shift. He placed all of his documents and his laptop back into his bag carefully, making sure not to leave anything behind. One time he'd accidentally knocked a paper under the chair, and he hadn't noticed until the next day. Thankfully, nobody else had either.

After triple checking that he hadn't dropped anything, he picked up the stack of cups that had accumulated on the table in Kokichi's absence. He stretched briefly, then made his way over to the garbage can across the alcove. He was just about to toss the cups in when he caught sight of Kokichi's number again. He briefly considered at least putting it into his phone - just in case, ya know? - but tossed it into the garbage in the end.

"Have a good night," he said to Maki.

"You too," she mumbled.

Shuichi let the door slam behind him, thoughts of his case and Kokichi swirling around in his mind. He took a deep breath, trying to ignore

it. He'd have the next day to sort it all out. He just wanted to go home and sleep.

…

Or maybe have just *one* more cup of coffee…

Day Two

“Mornin’, Shumai!”

Shuichi’s eye twitched slightly as Kokichi’s voice cut through the quiet atmosphere of the coffee shop. He hadn’t been able to sleep well the night before, his curiosity about the case plaguing him throughout the night. He’d ended up staying up late, pouring over the case until he’d fallen asleep at his kitchen table. Needless to say, he was low on both energy and patience. If he’d learned anything the day before, that didn’t seem like a good combination for dealing with Kokichi.

“Good morning,” Shuichi mumbled, walking past him without a sideways glance.

Kokichi’s face fell almost instantly. Shuichi hadn’t looked or sounded all too pleased to see him. He knew he’d never called him the night before - he hadn’t even bothered to text - but he had kind of hoped Shuichi just hadn’t seen the number he’d left on the cup. However, it seemed as if he really was just fed up with him…

“That must be a new record,” he sighed to himself. He was used to it. Annoying people, that is. Everybody got upset with him in the end. (Usually it was at least a *few* days though…) Honestly, he couldn’t blame them. Most of the time he did it on purpose. Pushed all their buttons until he drove them away. Every time it stung, but he could never bring himself to stop. It was impulsive, almost. So he pretended that he enjoyed it.

“A new record?”

Kokichi’s eyes snapped back up from the countertop. Shuichi was still standing in front of him, staring at him with a sleepy gaze. He noticed then that he had dark circles under his eyes, and more than just that silly stubborn piece of hair at the top of his head was sticking up. Had he… slept?

“Damn, Saihara-chan, I think you need a nap,” Kokichi teased instead of answering his question.

Shuichi watched him for a moment more, exhausted brain trying to decide if it was worth it to point out his obvious aversion of the question. “...Yeah,” he said quietly, deciding not to.

“Do you want something to drink, or…?”

“Just coffee, please,” he said, turning away to begin walking towards the alcove.

“Yeah, you need it,” Kokichi said with a laugh. “Black?”

Shuichi didn’t reply at first, a little shocked that he had even bothered to ask in the first place. “Surprise me,” he sighed in what may have been a lapse of judgement.

Kokichi didn’t say anything, but raised an eyebrow as he watched Shuichi shuffle to the back of the shop, disappearing behind the wall that blocked in the alcove. He looked as if he might pass out at any moment. Kokichi hadn’t seen him eat anything the previous day either... Despite the fact that he told himself he wasn’t going to care about Shuichi, not for real, anyways, he found himself worrying that he wasn’t taking care of himself.

Kokichi absentmindedly made Shuichi a mocha and grabbed a yogurt parfait out of the refrigerator for him as well. He figured he’d probably like that more than any of the pastries they sold. Abandoning his place at the counter, he carefully made his way over to Shuichi’s table.

He found the boy sitting in the same chair he had been the day before, staring blankly at the table in front of him. His bag was in his lap, and he hadn’t bothered to pull anything out of it yet. He almost looked possessed. Maybe Kokichi had been right to be concerned…

“Hey! Earth to Blueberry-chan!” Kokichi called, setting the cups down in front of him and waving a hand in front of his face.

“Huh-?!” Shuichi jumped, blinking a few times before looking up at Kokichi with wide eyes. “Oh, sorry…” he mumbled. “Just… spaced out there for a minute, I guess.”

“Careful, or you might fall asleep in the middle of something important!” Kokichi warned with a mischievous laugh. “Who knows what would happen if I were to catch you~”

“You’d probably draw a moustache on me with a Sharpie,” Shuichi sighed, picking up the coffee. He was a little surprised to taste chocolate, but not immediately recoil at the sweetness of it.

“Pretty good, huh?” Kokichi said. He was smirking triumphantly.

“It’s my special recipe!” He’d purposely gotten bitter dark chocolate just for Shuichi, leaving out the sugar for him as well.

“Yeah, it’s nice,” Shuichi told him. It sounded dismissive, but the way he sunk back a little farther into the couch and continued to sip it was enough satisfaction for Kokichi.

“Well… Let me know if I can getcha anything, alright?” Kokichi said, turning to leave. He had been intent on bothering him some more, but he had decided to have a little mercy on him the moment he saw Shuichi walk in looking so exhausted.

“Oh, actually-!”

Kokichi turned back around quickly, raising an eyebrow at Shuichi. He was leaning forward slightly, hand outstretched towards him. He sounded urgent, as if his request had been important.

“Yeah?”

Shuichi hesitated. He hadn’t really needed anything. He wasn’t quite sure why he called out to Kokichi in the first place. Maybe a part of him wanted the boy to stay. It would have been an excuse for him to put off working for a few more minutes… But… no. No way. There was no way that was the case.

“Uhh…” Panicking a little, he glanced down at the table. “A- A spoon!” he cried a little too enthusiastically. “Y-Yeah, a spoon…”

“A… spoon,” Kokichi echoed. His face fell visibly, but he recovered so quickly Shuichi dismissed it as his tired brain playing tricks on him. “Right! Wow, I’m such a moron! Forgetting to bring you a spoon. Duh!”

“You’re not a moron,” Shuichi said quietly.

Kokichi stiffened. He stared at Shuichi with wide eyes, mouth hanging slightly open. He was taken by so much surprise he was unable to cover up his shock like he usually did. Shuichi stared back up at him, eyes half closed and brows slightly furrowed.

“Did I say something?” he asked when Kokichi didn’t reply.

“N-No!” Kokichi cried, brought back to his senses at Shuichi’s inquiry. “Nope!” He flashed a smirk at him. “Of course I know I’m not a moron, moron!”

Shuichi raised an eyebrow. It was clear he was lying, something he was beginning to suspect he did a lot of. However, before he could even decide if he wanted to call him out on it, Kokichi was prancing away towards the front of the store again to get him the spoon he'd asked for.

He sighed, setting his coffee cup down on the table and sinking back into the chair. He closed his eyes, trying to sort out all his thoughts. He had to work on the case, he knew that, but his brain was foggy and all he could think about was Kokichi, especially his reaction when he'd said he wasn't a moron.

Why had he seemed so shocked? Was it because he wasn't expecting that from him? He... didn't think he'd been *that* hostile the previous day. Or was he just that unused to being shown a little decency? His personality *was* pretty abrasive, so it would make sense for him to not have many friends, but…

He was probably overthinking it. Kaede said he did that a lot.

Kokichi quickly pulled a spoon out of the container they held them in on the front counter. His hands were shaking, and he was clearly flustered. Kaede raised an eyebrow when he scuttled away again, avoiding eye contact. His body language made it obvious that he didn't want to talk to her, so she let him go without bothering him.

'Deep breaths,' Kokichi told himself as he walked back towards the alcove. He didn't know why he was panicking so much. It was stupid, wasn't it? He hadn't even said anything all that nice. That's… how people were expected to respond, right? Would he even know?

"Here's your-" Kokichi stopped suddenly as he rounded the corner, catching sight of Shuichi slumped over in the chair, eyes closed and snoring softly.

Kokichi didn't mean to stare, but the way Shuichi's face had turned so peaceful entranced him. His absurdly long eyelashes… The way his chest gently rose and fell as he slept… The way his lips were slightly parted… It was something almost beautiful. Was that creepy? Was he a creep for thinking that? He definitely was. Only weirdos watched other people sleep.

Shaking his head, he grabbed the coffee and the parfait and brought them back to the front of the shop. Kaede watched as he pulled out a Sharpie from his pocket, wrote Shuichi's name on the yogurt, and stuck it back inside the fridge with the spoon sitting on top of the lid.

“He didn’t want it?” Kaede asked. She knew Shuichi liked them, and even more importantly that he was usually far too polite to refuse something if it was given to him.

“He fell asleep,” Kokichi mumbled. He poured the coffee out of the cup and tossed it into a nearby garbage can.

“Good,” Kaede sighed, shaking her head. “He needs a rest.”

Kokichi hummed in agreement, though he didn’t say anything more. Kaede couldn’t help but wonder if something was wrong when he didn’t offer his usual chatter or biting comment. She watched in curiosity as Kokichi disappeared up into the loft, not appearing again for quite a few minutes. She couldn’t hear any yelling or banging though, so at least she knew he wasn’t bothering Maki too much.

He returned a few moments later with a blanket, rushing down the stairs and making a beeline towards Shuichi. Kaede continued to watch with amusement, beginning to get an idea of what exactly was going on. It didn’t take a talented private investigator to figure out that Kokichi had taken an interest in Shuichi. Though she had pretended not to notice Kokichi scrawling out his number on the cup the day before, she thought it was pretty apparent.

Kokichi tossed the blanket out on top of Shuichi and turned to go, intent on leaving it thrown haphazardly on top of him. But after taking a few steps, he quickly changed his mind. Adjusting it so that everything but his head was covered nicely, he took a step back and frowned.

His chest tightened a bit as he stared at the boy again. Kokichi shook his head, running his hands through his hair. He just thought he was cute, that’s all. And besides, he *was* trying to be… at least a slightly better person. That’s the only reason he’d gotten him a blanket. Not because he *cared* .

He couldn’t afford to do that.

With a slap of his cheeks to clear his mind, Kokichi spun on his heel and walked back to the front counter with the normal spring in his step. He was thankful to find that Kaede wasn’t watching him anymore - he’d been able to feel her eyes on him - but was taking somebody’s order.

Kokichi leaned against the back of the counter, hand resting on his chin as he contemplated what he should do. He’d had a plan for the

day, of course, but it had all been thrown out the window the second he saw Shuichi snoozing on the chair. He couldn't wake him, obviously, but that also meant he wouldn't be able to talk to him…

"Hey," Kaede said softly, snapping Kokichi out of his thoughts.

"Yeah?" Kokichi straightened up a little bit, looking over to Kaede, who had just handed a latte to an impatient looking woman now rushing out the door. "Need me to do something?"

"No, nothing like that," she told him with a smile. "I just wanted to know what you thought of Saihara-kun."

"Oh? Why's that?" Kokichi asked, leaning towards her. "Want me to be the ring bearer at your wedding or somethin'?"

Kaede laughed, bubbly and light, and it was like a little weight was taken off of Kokichi's shoulders. She didn't know the effect just her presence had on other people. She looked back over to him and he gave her a big grin in return.

"Of course not," Kaede said.

"I dunno… Sounds suspicious!" Kokichi teased, though he knew full well that she was being genuine. He leaned towards her a little more with a self satisfied smirk on his face.

"Saihara-kun doesn't swing that way," Kaede returned, leaning towards him a bit as well and mirroring his look.

Kokichi's eyes grew slightly wider, just enough for Kaede to take notice, before he quickly pulled back and gave her a little more of a hostile grin, arms crossed in front of him. Thoughts were racing through his head, his heart threatening to beat out of his chest. He hoped Kaede couldn't see through his persona.

"Bet you wish he did though, Akamatsu-chan," he spit, a lot more venom to his tone than he had wanted. He'd unintentionally laid it on thick in a panic to distract from his own discomfort.

Kaede blinked, a little surprised at his slight change in attitude, but nonetheless remained patient with him. "Maybe in junior high," she said with another laugh.

"O-kay, if you say so..." Kokichi drawled, recovering quickly. "But to answer your question, I think Shumai is kind of a loser. He's just a

workaholic. That's like his whole personality!"

Kaede paused, as if thinking about his answer for a moment. "Alright, now this time answer me without lying about it," she requested, looking away from him and idly wiping down the counter.

Silence filled the air between them. Kokichi stared at Kaede with a small frown on his face. She'd seen right through his fib with complete confidence. His gaze fell to the floor. He couldn't tell her the whole truth. It's not like she'd be angry, but she *would* be upset, and while Kokichi could take someone yelling at him, he didn't think he wanted to see the look of disappointment Kaede was bound to give him if she knew what he was up to.

Kaede continued messing around with things on the counter, straightening out the napkin dispenser or recentering the signs on the display. She thought if she tried to look distracted, Kokichi might feel more comfortable. The silence had gone on for so long she was sure he just wasn't going to answer her. He was so light on his feet that he might have even slipped away. She was surprised to hear him speak up, his voice uncharacteristically soft.

"He's interesting."

It wasn't what she had been expecting. She thought he'd say something about him being cool because of his detective work, or maybe that he just thought he was cute or something. Followed, of course, by some Kokichi-esque snarky comment to top it off. But it was a short answer, and a sincere one at that.

"What," Kokichi said, frowning at Kaede as she turned to stare at him. "It's not that I like that soggy walnut," he said, waving his hand in front of his face. "He's just interesting, ya know? Not good, not bad. Just interesting."

Kaede hummed. "Still… It almost seems like a compliment coming from you," she said.

"What's that supposed to mean?!" Kokichi cried, all signs of vulnerability gone in an instant. "I am *great* at giving compliments. You're so meeeaaan, Akamatsu-chan!"

"I bet you couldn't give a sincere compliment if your life depended on it," she said, shaking her head. She was smiling, indicating to Kokichi that she wasn't being serious.

“Uh, yeah I could!” he argued, pouting a little bit. “Like, the latte you made me when I came in for my job interview was suuuper good! Nice and sweet, just how I like it! You made it pretty much perfectly.”

“Thanks, Ouma-kun,” Kaede said softly. It hadn’t been very thoughtful praise, but she had a feeling that it would be a while before she got Kokichi to drop his act for her again. And besides, he had at least sounded genuine.

“Told you I could do it,” he boasted, as if it were something he should be proud of. And he was, just a little bit. It had made Kaede smile, and he wanted to hold onto the feeling of finally saying something right for once.

Maybe he should try giving Shuichi a compliment. A real one, not just calling him a snazzy detective guy. As Kaede moved her focus to the customer that had just entered, he slipped away from the counter and back to where Shuichi was still fast asleep.

He hadn’t moved at all since Kokichi had seen him last. Apparently he wasn’t a restless sleeper, something that Kokichi couldn’t relate to. Kokichi, when he slept at all, usually woke up with his bed sheets on the floor and his feet where his head should be. He was sure that’d really annoy Shuichi if they were to share a bed...

Wait.

“Pull yourself together!” Kokichi hissed at himself, falling into the seat across from Shuichi.

He pulled out a pad of purple sticky notes - purple was kind of his thing - and the Sharpie from his apron pocket. He sat there for a few moments, marker hovering over the paper, but he couldn’t think of anything to write. He glanced up at Shuichi. Maybe that would help him think of something?

He groaned, sinking further into the chair. And what was he going to write? *‘You have incredibly pretty eyelashes’* ? *‘Your hair looks so soft… I want to run my hands through it forever’* ? *‘The way you mumble in your sleep is actually kind of endearing’* ? No. Absolutely not. Looking at him wasn’t going to help at all.

Kokichi squeezed his eyes shut. What would be something Shuichi would like to see? What had he responded positively to the day before? Kokichi realised with a sinking stomach that all he’d really

done thus far was annoy him.

Finally, after ten minutes of thinking, rethinking, and overthinking, he settled on something. He'd gone through at least fifteen sticky notes, most of them crumpled up and shoved back into his pocket. He still wasn't sure if Shuichi would appreciate it at all, or if he'd just think he was weird, but it was worth a shot, right?

With a deep breath, he stuck the single sticky note on the table in front of Shuichi. Hopefully he wouldn't even wake until long after Kokichi's shift had ended. Save him the mortification. Unfortunately, Lady Luck wasn't exactly on his side that day.

Shuichi sighed, shifting slightly on the chair and snuggling into the blanket on top of him. He was warm and cozy, and he found himself wishing he'd never have to move again. Just as he was on the cusp of falling back asleep, something tickled his nose.

He blinked fully awake, realising with a sickening feeling of dread that he'd fallen asleep before he could even open his bag. He didn't even want to begin thinking about how much time he probably lost. Confusion quickly settled in as he noticed that someone had brought him a blanket. He fell asleep at the coffee shop every once in a while, but nobody had ever bothered to do that before.

With the feeling of an oncoming sneeze, Shuichi suddenly remembered what had stirred him from his slumber in the first place. Reaching up, he plucked a purple sticky note off of his top lip. He was met with a crudely drawn moustache as he flipped it around. He smiled to himself, recalling what he'd said to Kokichi shortly before falling asleep.

Shuichi sat up, stretching briefly before removing the blanket and folding it neatly over the back of the chair. He stood up to go grab some coffee when he noticed another sticky note on the table in front of him. Raising a brow, he picked it up, wondering what kind of nonsense Kokichi wanted to bother him with that time.

Remember to take care of yourself.

He just stared at it for a few moments, taking a minute to process what it said. He felt a little bad, having assumed it was going to be some insignificant insult, but instead getting what seemed like actual concern for his well being. It seemed that Kokichi was a lot kinder of

a person than he cared to let on, something that Kaede had probably noticed from the moment she met him.

Smiling a little to himself, Shuichi folded up the sticky notes together and put them in the pocket of his dress shirt. Maybe he shouldn't be so hard on Kokichi. He did seem like he was making quite the effort to be friends. Whether or not he had an ulterior motive remained to be seen. But even Kokichi deserved a chance, he supposed.

"Have a nice nap?" Kaede asked as Shuichi wandered up to the counter.

"Yeah, I did, thanks," he said, glancing at the clock on the wall and noting with relief that it was only a little past noon.

"Oh? Is Sleeping Beauty finally awake?"

Shuichi's gaze snapped over to the door to the back room. Kokichi was sticking his head out, a little smirk on his face. He seemed just as mildly irritating as usual, so Shuichi decided not to bring up the note he'd left him.

"I was beginning to think that I, as your Prince Charming and true love, was gonna have to come kiss you awake! Neeheehee!"

"I'd rather die, thanks," Shuichi grumbled.

Kokichi laughed again, thankfully not seeming to take offense. "Yeesh, Saihara-chan! Grumpy when he gets up, huh? Get that weenie some caffeine!"

"Hey-!"

Before Shuichi could argue, Kokichi disappeared back behind the door, letting it close behind him. Shuichi sighed. It probably wasn't worth it in the first place anyways. Arguing with Kokichi didn't ever seem to be worth the while.

"You two been getting along?" Kaede asked. She set a cup of coffee in front of Shuichi, who took it gratefully.

"I guess," he said. He took a sip of the coffee and instantly regretted the decision, burning his tongue on it.

"You guess?" Kaede echoed, laughing at the face he had made.

"He's just so…" Shuichi paused, trying to think of a word to use that

wasn't an insult. "Overbearing?" Good enough. Kaede only hummed in response, so he continued. "But it feels insincere. He's the one that brought me the blanket, isn't he?"

"Yep!" Kaede said with a smile. "You see it too, don't you?" she asked.

Shuichi broke eye contact with her, suddenly becoming very interested in the pattern of granite on the countertop. "Sometimes when I say things… he falters for a moment. But he always denies it. It's like he's… afraid. I didn't want to say anything. I thought I was just overthinking things again. And besides, it's not like I know him. At first I thought I knew that he'd be nothing but an annoyance, but now… I don't know what to think anymore."

Kokichi choked on his breath as he sat by the door, listening in on their conversation. His intent had been to learn a little more about Shuichi, but clearly he'd gotten more than he bargained for.

His chest hurt. His heart ached. Shuichi and Kaede… They could see through him so easily. And who were they to do such a thing?! Especially Shuichi; he'd only known him for a day and a half! ...Maybe he was less talented of a liar than he thought? It had never occurred to him until then that maybe people *did* notice. Maybe they just hadn't cared enough to say anything.

"But you *could* ," Kaede said, interrupting his thoughts. "Get to know him, that is." Shuichi didn't reply to her. "It seems to me that he needs someone to be there for him," she continued. "I think we should try our best to be those people for him."

"Leave it to you to play hero," Shuichi sighed, and Kokichi felt his stomach twist.

Kokichi sighed quietly. He'd screwed it up again, hadn't he? He *would* . He'd have to try a little harder to keep them out. That *is* what he wanted, after all, wasn't it? To keep them out?

After a long pause, Shuichi spoke up again. "But I agree. I can't be as patient and understanding as you, but… I can try."

No. That's not what he wanted.

Kokichi realised with despair that he was in it for more than just the job. In the couple weeks he'd known Kaede, she'd shown him more kindness than anybody else had in his life combined. And he was

confident that Shuichi was the same. Kokichi was an *excellent* judge of character, if he did say so himself.

Even though he said he wasn't going to get involved… he found himself wanting to anyways. He *wanted* to be friends with them, *really* be friends with them. It was very suddenly more than just a game. Was it… normal to feel like that? Was that how everybody felt all the time when they were making new friends? All he ever knew how to do was hide behind his mask of lies and indifference.

With a shake of his head, Kokichi stood up and moved away from the door, going back to the job he was supposed to be doing anyways. He shouldn't worry about it. It would get easier with time or something cheesy like that, right? Best to mull it over when he got home.

"Good!" Kaede exclaimed, giving Shuichi a smile. "So how's your case going?"

Shuichi relaxed, glad for a change of subject. He hadn't realised he'd tensed up. "It's complicated," he sighed, rubbing his eyes. God. He'd nearly forgotten about it.

"Well! You've gotten some sleep and a cup of coffee, so I'm sure looking at it with fresh eyes will do you good," Kaede said. "I know you can work it out, Shuichi. You always do."

"Thanks, Kaede," he said, finally returning her smile. He got up, stretching a little. "Speaking of which, I should get to work on that."

"Good luck!" she called as he began to return to his chair.

Shuichi took a deep breath, pulling out his laptop along with the case file. He could worry about Kokichi later. Or when somebody was paying him to do so. The more pressing matter of his unsolved case was still looming over his head. Time to get to work.

Kokichi found Shuichi hunched over the table, brows furrowed and hand buried in his hair. He was looking at a document, but his stare was blank. He wasn't reading, but rather he was deep in thought. He looked *stressed* .

"Tough case?" Kokichi asked, setting a cup of tea in front of him and plunking himself down in the seat across from Shuichi.

“Yeah,” Shuichi sighed. He leaned back and slouched over in the armchair. “Every time I think I’ve finally got something, the whole case turns itself on its head.” Almost like Kokichi…

“That complicated, huh?”

“Unfortunately,” Shuichi said. “But nothing I haven’t dealt with before.”

“Riiight,” Kokichi said slowly. “I forgot you were, like, Mister Detective Extraordinaire. Solving cold cases all by himself.”

“I don’t… really solve cold cases that often,” Shuichi replied with a nervous laugh.

“Still! You’ve gotta be pretty smart to be a detective, right?” Kokichi gave him a big closed-eyed smile. “I bet you were a total nerd! Nishishi!”

Shuichi laughed. It was quiet and gentle, and it made Kokichi’s heart flutter. “Yeah, you could say that.”

“At least you’re a cute nerd!” Kokichi added. “Smart *and* attractive? I bet you had girls bending over backwards for you, huh, Saihara-chan?” While Kokichi really *did* think Shuichi was cute, the praise wasn’t meant to be taken seriously. He just thought Shuichi needed a momentary distraction from the case that was so obviously taking a toll on him.

“Ah… Not exactly,” Shuichi said. His cheeks were turning a little pink as he became more and more embarrassed.

“Really?!” Kokichi cried. “Wow. You must have gone to school with some dumb girls if they passed up a real snack like you~”

“A… snack?” Shuichi repeated, a slight tilt to his head.

“Oh my *god* , Shumai!” Kokichi whined, dramatically falling over the chair, hand to his forehead like a damsel in distress. “Why do I even bother trying to flirt with you?”

“Uhh…” Shuichi wasn’t quite sure how to reply. Between trying to figure out *why* Kokichi would be flirting with him and deciding whether or not he should tell him to stop, he couldn’t really come up with a coherent sentence.

“For a detective, you’re pretty clueless, Saihara-chan!” Kokichi exclaimed with another laugh. “Don’t worry, I find it endearing!”

“Is that so?” Shuichi asked, somewhere between flustered and annoyed. While he *had* told Kaede he wanted to help… it was going to prove to be a difficult task.

Kokichi was exasperatingly hard to read. Sometimes he seemed like just an annoyance, someone that pushed his buttons for the fun of it. Sometimes it seemed like he was hiding behind that behaviour, but then he would turn around and completely convince Shuichi that he found great pleasure in testing his patience. Sometimes, like then, his flattery left his cheeks rosy and his heart beating faster. Honestly? Kokichi Ouma was a headache.

“Yep!” Kokichi sprang up from the chair, giving Shuichi a wink. “Good luck on your case! Later, gator!”

“H-Hey, wait!” Shuichi called, standing up as well. Kokichi turned back to him, eyebrow raised. “That note, from earlier-”

“No idea what you’re talkin’ about!” Kokichi interrupted.

“But-”

“That case must be making you crazy, Blueberry-chan! See ya!”

Shuichi let him go, not bothering to call him back again. He *had* been expecting Kokichi to deny it. He wanted to at least thank him, but he supposed he’d have to just drop it. He’d rather not deal with any more of Kokichi’s relentless teasing anyways. Kaede may have ample patience for that kind of thing, but Shuichi did not.

With a sigh, he sank down into his chair again, picking up the tea Kokichi had brought him and idly re-reading the document he was looking at when he’d arrived. The tea smelled floral and slightly lemony, and almost instantly Shuichi felt a little bit better. Kokichi had been smart to bring him something to relax with rather than yet another cup of the jitters in liquid form.

Settling back into the chair, he prepared to dive back into his case. He wanted it done by the end of the week, and while it wasn’t impossible, it would require a fair bit of intense focusing. Something that seemed like it would be harder to come by from then on out. With a bit of hard work though, he was sure he could do it. He took one last sip of tea before dragging his laptop closer to him and setting

to work again.

“Alright, my beloved Saihara-chan! I’m off for the day now. Don’t go missing me too much~”

“...Huh?”

Shuichi looked up from his laptop, glasses sliding off of his nose slightly. He hadn’t noticed that so much time had passed. Kokichi stopped by a few more times to bring him more drinks, of course, but he had mostly left him alone, only briefly asking how things were going before leaving again.

Kokichi set a cup of water down on the table along with the parfait he hadn’t eaten earlier. “You’re gonna get super dehydrated if you only drink coffee and tea all the time, you dummy,” he said. “That’s probably why you looked so much like a zombie this morning!”

“Oh, right. Thanks,” Shuichi said. He’d been so focused on the case that, admittedly, he had been forgetting the water bottle he kept in his bag with him.

“You’ve gotta take care of yourself!” Kokichi said matter of factly, reminding Shuichi of the note he’d left earlier. “If you died I don’t know what I’d do! I’d perish of grief over my darling detective!” He clutched his chest dramatically, looking up towards the ceiling for added effect.

“Okay, okay, I get it,” Shuichi said with a laugh. “No need for the lies or theatrics.”

“Whaaat!” Kokichi cried, becoming even more melodramatic. “These aren’t *lies* and *theatrics* , Shuichi Saihara! How dare you accuse me of something so awful!”

“Ah, my apologies then, Ouma-kun,” Shuichi said softly, a smile growing on his face. Kokichi… had his moments.

“Apology accepted, peasant!”

Ah. Moment ended.

“Well, see you tomorrow then, Shumai!” he said, spinning on his heel and marching across the coffee shop and out the door.

Shuichi took a deep breath, looking back to the table with all of his work splayed out on it. It always seemed to be hit or miss when Kokichi stopped by. Sometimes it was a welcome relief, giving him a brief break from the increasingly complicated case. Other times it only worsened his headache. He couldn't decide if he thought the chance was worth it.

Deciding to take a break to eat, Shuichi took his glasses off and picked up the parfait Kokichi had left him. His name was scrawled on the side of the cup, and he noticed with a wince that Kokichi had left his number under it again. He set the cup down and stared at it for a few moments, contemplating what he should do.

On one hand, Shuichi felt a little bad about ignoring it twice in a row. On the other, it wasn't like Kokichi would know that he put it in his phone if he did, and he *definitely* wasn't going to call him. So… why bother? He honestly still wasn't sure how he felt about Kokichi, but he *did* know for a fact that he didn't want Kokichi to be able to call and text him whenever he wanted.

With a shake of his head, he decided to just ignore it. He scarcely used his phone in the first place, a grand total of four people making up his list of contacts, two of which were his parents. Kokichi would probably leave his number again the next day anyways. He seemed the type.

No, Shuichi didn't like him that much.

At least… not yet.

Day Three

Chapter Notes

Happy birthday, Lina! This is for you~! ^^

Every ounce of Shuichi's being had craved to stay up and catch up on work the night before. He'd lost a few hours while he slept during the day, and with Kokichi as an added distraction, he hadn't been getting as much work done as usual. It was stressing him out, and he would feel *awful* if he took too long to solve the case.

But the note Kokichi left him felt like it weighed a thousand pounds in his pocket, making his heart heavy with guilt as if he somehow owed it to him to do as he said. He'd ended up dropping his bag on the table and heading straight to bed. It would be best not to fall asleep again at the coffee shop anyways. If Kyoko saw him, she'd probably have a lot more to say to him than Kokichi had… And it most certainly wouldn't be quite so nice.

Admittedly, thoughts of Kokichi had kept Shuichi up anyways, at least for a little while. He'd tossed and turned in bed for an hour or two, trying his best to wrap his mind around the enigma that was Kokichi Ouma. Just who was he? What was going on in his mind? What he wouldn't give to read his thoughts, just for a day…

During Shuichi's morning commute to the coffee shop, Kokichi wormed his way into his thoughts again. He was starting to feel even *more* guilty that he'd thrown away his number the day before. Surely that had hurt Kokichi's feelings, hadn't it? And he'd have to face him again that day, both of them knowing full well what he'd done.

And yet, Kokichi was sure to greet him with a smile and a wave, like he'd done the previous couple days. It seemed like his style to hide any sense of vulnerability he might have. Shuichi wondered if that was just how he naturally was, or if he'd grown to be like that because of something.

He was so lost in thought that he walked right past Brioso, having to stop and double back after he'd reached the street corner without realising it. Even after going there nearly every day for years, Kokichi managed to distract him enough for him to miss it. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to try to be closer to that boy.

Nevertheless, he shrugged off the thought and got ready for another gruelling day of harassment and detective work. He could already see Kokichi grinning at him through the glass doors of the coffee shop as he pulled one open and stepped inside. The fresh scent of coffee helped to ease his mind a little, and he was grateful for the calming atmosphere that Brioso provided.

Kokichi greeted him with bright words and an even brighter smile. "G'morning, Blueberry-chan! Good to see you!"

"Good morning, Ouma-kun," Shuichi returned. It was all he could do to give him a small smile and a nod, the guilt from the previous day eating away at him.

"Glad to see you're not looking like you've been crushed by a hydraulic press today, my darling detective!" Kokichi teased, laughing a bit at him.

"R… Right…" Shuichi thought his description was a little odd, but so was everything Kokichi said, so he brushed it off. "Well, I've got a lot of work to get done today, so I'm afraid I can't stay to talk. A coffee would be nice though, if you don't mind."

"Sure thing, Shumai," Kokichi said with a little salute. "I'll be sure not to bother you too much today so you can do your cool detective thing, alright?"

"Ah… Thanks," Shuichi mumbled, tearing his eyes away from the boy. "You don't have to make yourself a stranger or anything though." He wasn't sure quite why he'd added that last bit. Because he told Kaede he'd try to be his friend? Because he felt bad about not calling him? Whatever the reason, it was too late to take it back.

"If you say so, Saihara-chan," Kokichi said, though he had turned away from him to work on making his coffee.

Shuichi gave him a nod that he didn't see before sneaking off to his chair for the day. He sat down and immediately pulled out the case materials, determined to make a fair amount of progress that day, Kokichi be damned. His job was more important than Kokichi to him at the moment. If he didn't get the case done, he wouldn't be able to afford to come drink coffee there all day anyways.

His goal for the day was to try to find another suspect. It was abundantly clear to him by that point that the original suspect was not guilty, but he still didn't have a name for the person who *was* . He'd

work on piecing together the sequence of events and gathering evidence for his case in the days to come.

Kokichi came by a few minutes later with coffee, and Shuichi could tell from the smell that he hadn't added anything absurd to it like normal. When he set it down in front of him, Shuichi raised an inquisitive eyebrow at the boy.

"Gotta start the day right!" Kokichi explained. "You've got a long day of mystery solving ahead, don'tcha? And I'm not gonna be so merciful on you for the rest of the day, nishishi!"

"Ah. I see." Well… It was kind of nice? In Kokichi's own weird way.

"Soak it up while you can, Shumai!" Kokichi said, folding his hands behind his head. "And good luck with your little killing game~"

"It's… Not a game…" Shuichi said halfheartedly. Kokichi had turned on his heel and walked away before he'd even gotten the second word out.

He brushed it off, getting back to the matter at hand. He'd start by reexamining the evidence, focusing on looking for anything that might point to another suspect rather than looking for things that might convict the original one like he had been before. It would be tedious, but he may have overlooked something. If Kokichi was going to leave him alone like he'd said, he could probably get it done by the next day. Maybe even that night, if he really focused.

The hours dragged on as Shuichi poured over the evidence he had for what felt like the millionth time. Nothing caught his eye. Nothing jumped out at him. Even with new realisations and new conclusions, he still found himself feeling like he was running in circles.

Kokichi began to get a little concerned when he brought Shuichi his fourth cup of coffee, and Shuichi was looking at exactly the same document in exactly the same position as he had been when Kokichi had brought the third cup. A closer look at his face revealed clear frustration. Had the case come to a stand-still? Had something stumped the perfect private investigator?

"What's poppin'?" Kokichi asked, plopping himself down in the chair across from Shuichi.

Shuichi sighed, sitting back and rubbing his eyes under his glasses before taking them off completely. "I'm just… stuck," he admitted. "I

feel like no matter how many times I go over these things, I just can't find any new information."

"That's because you *can't* ," Kokichi said bluntly.

"...What?"

"Listen," Kokichi started, sitting up and forward and giving Shuichi his genuine attention. "You can read those documents ten times or ten million times, but no matter what, eventually you're going to read *everything* in them. Just taking in the same information over and over and over isn't going to get you any new stuff. What, did you think the pages were suddenly gonna sprout new words if you stared at them hard enough?"

"Well, no, but-"

"Silly Saihara-chan!" Kokichi interrupted. "What you need is a fresh set of eyes. A new opinion. I keep telling you, working alone isn't good for you. I'm honestly shocked a hermit like you has even managed to solve so many cases!"

Shuichi sighed. He was right. Shockingly, Kokichi had given him relatively intelligent insight. He *knew* that he would either have to take a long break or get someone else's opinion. But he couldn't afford to take a break, and he didn't have anybody else to show the case to. Who was he going to ask? Kyoko? Fat chance.

"Hey… Ouma-kun," Shuichi said suddenly.

"Hm? What's up, Shumai?"

"Do you think *you* could look over this case with me?"

…

"What."

Shuichi faltered. He'd said it without thinking. Technically speaking, he was a private investigator and he could do what he wanted. But… He usually liked to hold himself to the same confidentiality standards the police force did, even if it wasn't *officially* one of his policies. Asking Kokichi for help *was* okay, and it *would* be beneficial, but…

"Y-You just… You were the one who said I needed another set of eyes!" Shuichi spluttered. "And, to be perfectly honest, you seem like

you might get into some trouble yourself."

"Whaaat!" Kokichi cried. "Why would you say something so cruel to me, Saihara-chan?! You think I'm a bad person!? You think I'll be able to help you solve a murder case because I'm some cold, hard criminal too?! You're so meeeaaan!"

"N-No! Ouma-kun, calm down, please!" Shuichi begged, holding his hands out in front of him. "Kaede said you were having trouble finding a job," he explained. "And… I don't mean this in a rude way, but you're a little bit… chaotic?"

"Alright, alright, you got me," Kokichi admitted, calming down. "Maybe I had a few run-ins with the law. But it was just whatever stuff, you know? Stealing a few things, egging a few houses… It's not like I killed anybody!"

"I'm… not going to comment on that," Shuichi sighed, rubbing his temples. "Listen, do you want to help me or not? Despite how you act, I believe you're a pretty intelligent person."

"Well thanks," Kokichi said, sarcasm dripping from his voice. "You know, if you're going to ask someone for help, maybe you shouldn't give them *backhanded* compliments, Shumai."

"That brown button up makes your eyes look nice, now will you help me? Please?" Shuichi spit. He'd just said the first thing that came to his mind. He only realised what he'd said after the fact, but it was too late to take it back. The only thing he could do was try not to look too embarrassed as Kokichi's eyes widened.

"You know what? You're lucky I'm feeling generous today," he said. Shuichi was relieved when Kokichi didn't comment on what he'd said, but judging by the faint blush on his cheeks, he was equally as embarrassed.

"T-Thanks," Shuichi stuttered out. "Alright… Here's where I'm at right now. This girl, the victim, was stabbed with a large knife. The original suspect was her ex boyfriend, the one who the knife belonged to, but he's out of the question now. His alibi is sound. But… There are no other leads. The crime scene has long since been cleaned up, and all the other suspects were investigated and cleared. So I don't-"

"God, didn't you even consider for a moment that she might have killed *herself* ?" Kokichi interrupted. Shuichi stared at him, too shocked to say anything. "You've got no other suspects, nobody else

that could have done it… It seems obvious to me. And look at these photos of her! She cut all her hair off and dyed it *bright red* ?! That's a depression move if I've ever seen one."

"Ah… But don't you have purple streaks in your-"

"Don't dwell on it!" Kokichi snapped, cutting him off. " *Some* people like to dye their hair for *fashion* . And it matches my eyes, does it not, Saihara-chan~?"

"I don't think cutting and dying your hair is enough evidence to prove that someone is depressed, but you do make a good point regardless," Shuichi admitted. He felt ashamed that he hadn't thought of it before. Maybe Kokichi *was* preoccupying too many of his thoughts…

"Of course I do! Purple is an excellent colour, you know. I-"

"I meant about the victim," Shuichi said, interrupting before Kokichi could continue. "It was an amateur mistake, but I didn't consider it. So thank you."

"You're welcome, Blueberry-chan," Kokichi said with a big grin. "If that's all ya need, then I'll leave ya to it! Wouldn't want my darling detective to become too broke to come buy coffees all day, now would we?"

"Of course not," Shuichi said, a little exasperated.

He was a little surprised that asking Kokichi to help had turned out so well, but he was also glad that his gut impulse had been correct in trusting him. It wasn't often that he acted on impulse; usually he had to think things over a million times before he even made a *plan* to do the actual thing. It was strange, but… it was also kind of nice.

To his relief, things began falling into place quickly and easily. Everything was beginning to make sense. He felt like he finally had an answer. He'd need to find a way to prove that it had been suicide, but that would hopefully be simple enough. Everything he had in front of him fit in perfectly with that hypothesis.

The rest of his work day was spent scrawling out notes, piecing together a timeline, and making note of any evidence he might need to find. Kokichi stopped by a few more times with drinks, but left him mostly unbothered. He could tell Shuichi was focused, and after seeing him so stressed out the previous two days, he didn't want to interrupt his groove.

It was such a productive day that Shuichi actually finished doing everything he could before Kokichi had left for the day. He packed up his things and stretched, sitting back and relaxing in the armchair for a moment. As if he'd been waiting, Kokichi rounded the corner with another cup of coffee.

"Whoa, Saihara-chan!" he exclaimed. "Takin a break?"

"I've finished working," Shuichi told him. "There's some stuff I need to take care of elsewhere, but I've done all I can do for today. I owe that to you, actually. Thank you. Really."

"Y-Yeah, yeah, whatever," Kokichi mumbled, flustered at how earnest Shuichi sounded. He wasn't used to praise. "Of course it was thanks to me. I *am* a genius after all. Probably even smarter than you!"

"Smarter than me?" Shuichi echoed, an amused smile growing on his face. "You think so?"

"Yeah, I do!" Kokichi replied confidently. "What do you have, a stinky degree in criminal justice? I've got…" He threw something across the room, and it landed on the piano in the corner with a *'thunk!'* . "Street smarts!"

Shuichi laughed nervously. "Was… Was throwing that really necessary?" he asked.

"Uh, duh!" Kokichi said with a roll of his eyes.

Without answering him, Shuichi got up to go retrieve the object Kokichi had thrown. As he approached the piano, he realised it was a Sharpie. Did he always carry one with him or something? And what good was throwing it?

"Do you play?"

Shuichi jumped. He hadn't realised Kokichi had followed him over. He was quite light on his feet. He turned, looking to Kokichi. The boy was giving him a mischievous smirk, as if he were going to blackmail him with whatever answer he gave.

"The piano? A little," Shuichi admitted, fidgeting with Kokichi's Sharpie. "Nothing in comparison to Kaede though. I just played because my mother made me." It wasn't the whole truth, but Kokichi didn't need to know that.

“Well let’s hear it then!” Kokichi exclaimed, snatching the Sharpie back from him.

“W-What? Right here? Right now?” Shuichi asked, a little startled. He hadn’t played in months. Who knew if he even remembered anything.

“Yeah! The shop’s empty save for Akamatsu-chan and Harumaki,” Kokichi told him. “Now don’t be a wuss! Play me something, Blueberry-chan!”

“Ah…” Shuichi hesitated. It’d be okay, right? Piano was just like riding a bike. “Sure… Alright. I’ll try.”

He sat down at the bench, ghosting his fingers across the keys. It felt nice to be sitting at the piano again. He enjoyed playing, despite what he’d said about his mother forcing him to. He just never found the time anymore. He didn’t have one in his apartment, obviously, and he was always working when he was at Brioso.

“Well? You gonna play something or not?” Kokichi demanded. He’d sat himself down right next to Shuichi on the bench. They were so close that the sides of their bodies were pressed up against each other’s, and Kokichi could feel the warmth radiating off of the detective.

“Okay, okay,” Shuichi said. He promptly plunked out the first seven notes of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* .

“Not that!” Kokichi cried. “Any old baby could play that. Even me!” As if to demonstrate, he attempted to do the same thing Shuichi had. It would have worked… had he chosen the right note to start on. “See? And no Canon! Everybody is sick of Pachelbel’s dumb Canon in dumb D!”

“I… I like it…” Shuichi mumbled. “But fine.” He began playing *Flight of the Bumblebee* instead.

“You deflated helium balloon!” Kokichi whined. “That might be the only thing *worse* !”

Shuichi laughed. “I was only teasing you,” he said. He was smiling. He looked… relaxed. Kokichi was happy. That’s all he’d wanted.

The only thing he was truly confident enough to play in full was a piece that he’d composed at the end of his senior year in high school.

He hadn't really done anything with it, aside from show it off to Kaede, but he liked it all the same. And, more importantly, he'd played it a million times and so had it committed to memory for the rest of his life.

As he started playing, he found the muscle memory taking over. It was a relief, honestly. He was a little worried he'd botch it. It wasn't perfect - he *was* rather rusty, after all - but he played well.

Kokichi watched his hands, completely entranced. He'd always loved watching piano players. The way their fingers danced across the keys, the way they could make such beautiful music… He'd never wanted to learn - he found himself content to just appreciate it - but seeing it so close was something like he'd never experienced before. It almost made him *want* to learn.

Across the coffee shop, Kaede leaned over the counter, resting her chin in her hand. It had been ages since she'd heard Shuichi play. Like her, she knew he'd given it up when he went on to focus on his career. Unlike her though, he never played anymore. To know that Kokichi had coaxed it out of him… it made her smile.

Shuichi was so absorbed in playing that he almost forgot where he was. It felt nice to be able to relax and do something he enjoyed for once. He only snapped back to reality when Kokichi started clapping excitedly next to him.

"Wow, Shumai! That was amazing!" he cried. "What a pretty song! Just like your eyelashes! Where did you learn that?"

"W-What was that?" Shuichi stuttered out. Had… Had he heard him right? Did he say his *eyelashes* were pretty?

"I asked you where you learned that song."

"No, before that."

"I said it was pretty."

"Right, but… After that you said-"

"I think you must be going crazy, Saihara-chan!" Kokichi interrupted. It was clear he was avoiding the question. "I think that piano playing must've made you a little loopy!"

"Whatever you say, Ouma-kun," Shuichi said, giving up. "Anyways…

I wrote that song myself. Back in high school."

"You *wrote* that?!" Kokichi asked incredulously. "In *high school* ?! And you chose to become a *detective* ?! Saihara-chan, you are one *boring* guy!"

"H-Hey!"

"I can't believe you gave up being a pianist - a composer! - to be a snooze detective," Kokichi whined. "You could have been famous!"

"I'm… still relatively famous," Shuichi reminded him. He didn't like to gloat, but if the subject had already been brought up…

"I *guess* ," Kokichi sighed.

"What about you?" Shuichi asked suddenly. "What do *you* want to do with your life? Surely you don't just want to work here forever."

Kokichi panicked. He always hated it when people asked him that. He never thought he'd hear it coming from someone like Shuichi. The truth was, he didn't *know* what he wanted to do with his life. He hadn't even graduated university. His teen years were filled with mischief and feeling like he was invincible, and he hadn't wanted to let that go yet. With every passing year, he *knew* he'd have to find *something* , but it just made him sick to think about. He wasn't good for anything anywa-

"I'm sorry if I struck a nerve," Shuichi said. He'd guessed right in thinking that Kokichi's silence meant discomfort. "I didn't mean to offend you."

"What! You didn't offend me," Kokichi scoffed, recovering quickly. "I was just deciding if you were worthy of knowing. And maybe I *do* wanna work here forever! If it means seeing my beloved Saihara-chan every day, then I'd be glad to stick around!"

"O-Ouma-kun!" Shuichi exclaimed, his face exploding into shades of red. Was he-?!

"Don't flatter yourself too much, Shumai," Kokichi chastised. It was as if he could read his mind. "I just think you're entertaining! Nishishi!"

"Ah… Right. Of course," Shuichi mumbled. He felt… disappointed? Surely not… But there was… *something* . Some part of him that

wanted Kokichi to genuinely enjoy his company. Shuichi was certainly, in a weird way, starting to enjoy *his* .

“Don’t look so down!” Kokichi said, patting him a little too hard on the back. “You should take that as a compliment. I think most people are pretty boring.”

“Well… Thank you then,” Shuichi said hesitantly.

“Right! Well! I should get back to work,” Kokichi said suddenly, standing up. Shuichi noted bitterly that the right side of him felt unpleasantly chilly.

“There aren’t even any customers,” Shuichi reminded him.

“There’s you,” Kokichi countered, poking his nose.

Shuichi watched as Kokichi pranced away, back behind the counter with Kaede. They started talking about something as Kokichi began making another drink. Surely some horrifying sugary concoction, if Kokichi was making it for him.

He stood up as well, stretching a bit and heading over to pick up his bag. There was really no reason for him to stay any longer, so he figured he might as well go home. Or rather, to the office. There were a few calls he had to make, and he wanted to get them done before it got too late.

Slinging his bag over his shoulder, Shuichi approached the counter just as Kokichi was turning to walk back over to him. Kokichi raised an eyebrow, surprised to see Shuichi all packed up and ready to go.

“You’re leaving?” he asked. “Before my shift is over? Saihara-chan, how could yooouuu!”

“I have to take care of a few things,” Shuichi said sheepishly. “Sorry, Ouma-kun. But I’ll be back tomorrow, okay?”

“Hrm… Okay,” Kokichi grumbled. “But you’ve gotta promise you’ll come see me! Alright? I don’t know what I’d do without you to keep me entertained!”

“I don’t know… Maybe your job?” Shuichi suggested. His tone was dead serious, but the small smile on his face told Kokichi he was only teasing.

“Maybe if you weren’t such a distraction all the time, it wouldn’t be a problem!” Kokichi told him.

“You’re the one that’s distracting *me* most of the time,” Shuichi said with a nervous laugh.

“Not true!” Kokichi argued. “Blaming me… Terrible! You’re awful, Blueberry-chan.”

“You don’t really think that,” Shuichi said, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t I?”

Shuichi blinked, startled. Kokichi’s face was lacking his usual smile. He was staring at him earnestly, and his tone had been serious. Did he… Did he really think that way? Of course not, right? There was no way someone who called him ‘beloved’ so many times could hate him.

“No, you’re right!” Kokichi exclaimed, his signature smile back on his face. “I was just messin’ with ya! Nishishi!”

“R-Right,” Shuichi said. Why had he been so… nervous? Did he *really* care if Kokichi liked him or not? “Anyways, I need to get going. It was nice seeing you two.”

“Hey, wait!” Kokichi called as Shuichi turned to leave. “Don’t forget your drink, you dummy! I made it just for you!”

Shuichi turned back to Kokichi, taking the coffee from him. He hadn’t noticed, but while they’d been speaking, he’d slapped a to-go lid on the top of the paper cup. He also noticed, with a sinking stomach, that his number was sloppily scrawled onto the side again.

“Thanks,” Shuichi said, taking the drink with a smile.

“Bye, Saihara-chan!” Kokichi called.

“Have a nice evening, Shuichi!” Kaede added.

Shuichi sent them a wave over his shoulder and pushed the door open, stepping out onto the street. He paused outside the door, pulling out his phone. Kokichi… The boy sure was persistent. And, while he hated to admit it, he didn’t *really* dislike him. In fact, he was beginning to actually think that the obnoxious boy was *alright* . He glanced at the number on the cup again and sighed.

Opening up his contacts, he entered the number Kokichi had left on his coffee.

Inside, Kaede was watching Kokichi with an amused smile on her face. The boy was watching Shuichi. He was pretending not to, busying himself by wiping the same square foot of counter over and over again, but he wasn't very subtle. She figured he didn't really want to be. She very well knew that Kokichi was capable of being incredibly sneaky. He kept stealing glances out the door until he just stopped bothering to look away at all.

Kaede followed his gaze, noting that Shuichi was looking at the cup Kokichi had written his number on again. He sighed, took out his phone, and clearly put the number in. He probably didn't realise the two were still watching him, because he walked away after that, seemingly unaware.

There was a smile plastered on Kokichi's face. He was doing his best to contain it, but he couldn't help but let a little one slip. He didn't *want* to like Shuichi. Not genuinely, anyways. But he found that he really *did* . The fact that Shuichi hadn't thrown his number away again… It made him happy. But why? He didn't understand why it made his heart clench, why it made him feel so *warm* . It almost felt like…

Acceptance?

Day Four

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shuichi never considered himself a picky person, but the coffee he brewed at home never tasted nearly as good as the coffee he had at Brioso. Perhaps it was because Kaede kept high quality beans in stock. Perhaps it was their brewing method or equipment. Perhaps Shuichi just wasn't very good at making coffee. Or perhaps… it was the company.

The company… It had always just been Kaede there to converse with him every once in a while. But Kokichi forced himself into his day whether he wanted it or not. Did he like that? Did he prefer it? He still wasn't sure.

Gripping his travel mug a little tighter, Shuichi unlocked the door to his office. He couldn't be thinking about Kokichi. He had an important day ahead of him, and he needed to focus. Kokichi, his antics, and his own mysteries could all wait until *after* he was done working for the day.

Shuichi had called his clients the day before, asking if they had found anything unusual amongst their daughter's belongings. They had admitted that they hadn't actually gone through them at all. They couldn't bear to even look inside the room, let alone try to organise it. They were very kind, telling Shuichi that he was welcome to swing by the next day if he needed to look for something in particular. He hadn't told them what, of course. That kind of thing could wait. There was no need to worry them yet.

He laid his bag out on the large table in his investigation room. He pulled out the case file again, spreading the documents out in front of him. He hadn't worked in the room for quite a while, but he wanted to organise his thoughts before he went about his day. He needed to if he was going to see his clients again.

Writing things down on sticky notes, he began sticking things to the board on the wall behind him. All of his thoughts, no matter what they were, were scrawled onto a note and slapped up onto the board. Any relevant documents were put in page protectors and stuck up there with some tape as well. It was a way for him to organise things

so he'd know exactly what he still needed to think about.

After finishing, he started to sort through them. What was important? The description of the victim? No, that was well established. Cause of death? Absolutely not. It was simple, and it didn't need to be at the front of his mind anymore. His new thoughts about the original suspect? He'd leave it, just to be safe. His presumptions about suicide? Yes, and he'd better leave space around it for whatever he found out that day, too. Kokichi Ouma? ...Kokichi Ouma?

"How did that end up on there…?" Shuichi sighed, plucking it off the board and moving to throw it away. He hesitated, then placed it on the table instead. He *definitely* needed to do some more thinking on him. But later. Not that day. Not until the case was closed.

Once his thoughts were organised, he was left with a pretty clear picture. All of his thoughts were laid out in neat groups on the board. He'd need to tell his clients about his recent discoveries, of course, but he still couldn't decide if he should tell them about his new theory.

Shuichi put a hand over his mouth, regarding his bulletin board silently. On one hand, they might be able to offer him some good insight. On the other, it could bring them a lot of unnecessary emotional toil. After a few moments of thinking, he decided that if he found any new evidence that day, he'd mention it. Otherwise, it was probably best to keep quiet.

With that, Shuichi packed up his bag again, left his office, and headed towards his clients' house. They greeted him politely, but it was clear that having him there was a stark reminder of what had happened to their child. Shuichi kept his interactions with them short and professional, as he did with everybody he worked with. It was better for both parties that way.

He briefed them on his recent findings. They weren't pleased to hear that the case was more complicated than they'd originally thought, but they were glad to hear there was at least some progress. After all, ruling out a suspect was still getting them one step closer to the truth they wanted.

Shuichi had been a bit surprised - but definitely relieved - to hear that his clients were okay with leaving him alone in the girl's room and were allowing him to look through anything he needed to. He

thought they might have been upset by the idea of him rummaging around in all of her stuff. They must have been incredibly desperate for him to find out what was going on.

He started with the girl's desk. There wasn't anything particularly unusual about it. Some trinkets, her wallet, some school work… She'd been home when she was killed, so all of her personal belongings were there. There were some little notes and drawings from her friends, but none of them proved useful. He didn't find anything of importance, in the end, but that didn't deter him.

Continuing his search, he began going through her closet. Clothes, old boxes filled with childhood toys and papers, a giant stuffed bear… Nothing. The nightstand turned up nothing. All of her drawers, her shelves… He couldn't seem to find a single thing. He hadn't wanted to, but if he had to, he'd start looking through pockets and things like that as well.

But then, by mere chance, something caught his eye. He was replacing the girl's bed sheets when the mattress cover came up and off of the corner it was pulled around. He hadn't been planning on stripping the bed, but when he went to put it back, he noticed a small tear in the mattress. He reached inside carefully and found… a cellphone?

"I thought the police force already looked through her phone…" he mumbled to himself. "I wonder if she had two…?"

He stood up again, turning the phone on and waiting anxiously for it to start up. There was no password locking him out, surprisingly. She must have thought it was hidden well enough. Opening the phone, he discovered that it was, in fact, a working cell phone. Or rather, it *was* . It didn't seem to be getting a signal anymore. A quick scroll through the messages indicated that it belonged to the victim.

There were no messages to or from her parents on it, and he already knew that it wasn't on the same phone line. It must have been a secret, even to them. But who had gotten it for her? Had she gotten it for herself? Unlikely, since she was an unemployed university student. Was it one of her friends? And why? He'd have to ask around.

She had only talked to a select few people on that phone. No additional apps had been installed. No music. No photos. Only the bare minimum, as if she rarely used it. Her call and message history

were all with the same three people: her ex boyfriend, a girl who Shuichi recognised as her best friend, and a strange contact that was just listed as “Unknown”.

Shuichi had asked his clients if they knew anything about the phone or the people on it. Did they recognise Unknown’s number? They hadn’t, of course, but they *had* allowed Shuichi to take it with him. He thanked them profusely before heading out again.

As he got back into his car, he took out his own phone to check the time. The numbers “15:34” stared back at him from the screen. Kokichi’s shift was almost over… He’d better hurry back if he wanted to make it on time. He *had* promised, after all.

He didn’t bother to drive home and take the bus to the coffee shop, instead choosing to just drive there and park in the lot across the street. He’d left all the important documents in his office, so he left his bag in the car.

Shuichi frowned as he approached the shop. Inside, he could already see Kokichi arguing animatedly with one of Maki’s friends, Kaito, who was wearing an apron. Did he get hired? Shuichi winced. They were so into it that he could almost hear them already. ...Oh. He *could* hear them already.

“What do you *mean* chocolate milk comes from chocolate cows?” Kaito asked. “Are you just that stupid? Didn’t you go to university? Don’t you make hot chocolate, like, every day?”

“Chocolate milk and hot chocolate are *very* different!” Kokichi cried. “You must be a real dumbass if you don’t even know that!”

“Are you seriously-!”

“SHUMAI!”

Shuichi jumped a little. As he’d walked inside, he’d noticed that the coffee shop was completely empty save for the two bickering boys and Maki, who was sitting at a nearby table and staring into the distance. There were bags under her eyes, and she wore a look that threatened death to all that tried to talk to her. Anybody inside was probably scared off by Kaito and Kokichi. Or maybe they hadn’t even made it inside.

“You left me alone for so long!” Kokichi whined, grabbing Shuichi’s attention again.

“Ah… I’m sorry, Ouma-kun, I-”

“I had to sit here and suffer with nobody but this *idiot* for the entire day!” he interrupted, pointing an accusatory finger at Kaito.

“Idiot?! The only idiot here is *you* !” Kaito returned.

“Are you forgetting that *I* had to *suffer* with *both of you* today?” Maki hissed.

“Have they been at this long?” Shuichi asked, laughing nervously. He sat down at the table with Maki as the other two began arguing again.

“ *All. Day,* ” she grumbled. “Akamatsu shook me awake around seven saying she had some ‘family emergency’ she had to take care of. Rushed out the door before I could even reply and said something about me needing to cover her shift.”

“Oh…” Shuichi frowned. Kaede hadn’t even texted him. It must have been serious… He hoped that she was okay.

“I had *just* fallen asleep,” Maki sighed. “And I *wanted* to go *back* to sleep, but I had to deal with all those weirdo early risers. I called Kaito in to help me, but he didn’t bother showing up until this idiot already clocked in.” She slammed her head down on the table. “They’ve been at this since *ten thirty* .”

Shuichi winced again. It sounded like she’d hit her head rather hard. “Is… there anything I can do to help?”

“Is there any way you can get them to shut up?” Maki asked. “I *really* have to get some sleep before tonight.”

“I’ll do my best,” Shuichi told her, but he wasn’t actually all that confident.

“Saihara-chan!” Kokichi called. “Will you *please* tell this idiot that water isn’t wet?!”

“What do you *mean* water isn’t wet?!” Kaito yelled. He threw his hands up. “It’s *water* ! Water is! Wet! That’s just the way it is!”

“Water isn’t wet, it *makes* things wet!” Kokichi countered. “How many times do I have to tell you this before it gets through that thick skull of yours?” He tapped a fist against the side of his head and stuck his tongue out at Kaito.

“But water molecules are always touching other water molecules, so wouldn’t that make those other water molecules wet?” Kaito demanded.

“That’s not how science works, you big dummy!” Kokichi told him.

“Um, Ouma-kun-”

“I’m in graduate school!” Kaito interrupted. “Studying *science* !”

Shuichi sighed. Even though Kokichi had asked him for his opinion, he hadn’t even been able to get a word in. He doubted he’d be able to get their attention at all. What had even happened? Did they just get along so poorly that they had to start fighting immediately? They didn’t even know each other!

“Hey, Ouma-kun?” Saihara interrupted, trying to put a bit more force into his voice. He wanted Kokichi to *actually* pay attention, and it had worked.

Kokichi stopped what he was saying immediately and turned to him. “What can I do for you, my darling Saihara-chan?” he asked sweetly.

“Ah…” Shuichi panicked. “C-Could I get a coffee please?”

Kokichi just stared at him for a moment. A… coffee? He wanted a coffee in the middle of their argument? Ah… But it was probably meant to distract him so he couldn’t keep provoking Kaito, right? Well… He *supposed* he could indulge him.

He laughed. “Of course you can, Blueberry-chan!” he said with a smile. Without even so much as a glance at Kaito, Kokichi stepped away to begin making a drink for Shuichi.

“How… did you do that?” Kaito asked, exasperated.

“I just kind of said the first thing that came to mind,” Shuichi admitted. “How did this even start?”

Kaito sighed. “Honestly, I don’t even remember.” He rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. “But hey, it’s calmed down now, so it’s alright, yeah?” He smiled. “I’m sure Ouma and I can learn to get along.”

“Fat chance, Stars-For-Brains,” Kokichi quipped.

“Why do you insist on starting things with me?!” Kaito asked, exasperated. “What did I even say? What about me makes you so

pissed off, you little rat bastard?!"

"What about you *doesn't* make me pissed off is the real question, nishishi!" Kokichi grinned as he handed Shuichi his coffee. "And who are you calling a rat? You're the one that stinks around here, you know."

"Ouma-kun, is there anything that would make you stop bickering with him?" Shuichi asked. "Even just for today?"

"Oh?" Kokichi turned to look at Shuichi, a smirk growing on his face. "What would you be willing to do, my darling detective?"

Shuichi bristled. He didn't like the way Kokichi was looking at him. What was he gonna make him do? Vandalise something with him? Commit arson? No way. He couldn't get himself into a situation like that. He was a man of the *law* .

"Nothing illegal," Shuichi told him. He tried to give him a look that said he meant business.

"My demand is that you come to my house to play video games with me!" Kokichi immediately declared. "And also you need to buy me a nice piece of cake!"

Shuichi blinked. "...What?"

"I'm thinking something fruity!" Kokichi continued, either not noticing Shuichi's confusion or not caring. "Maybe strawberry… No! Peach! I have a particular fondness for peach desserts, you know! So jot that down!"

"Peach?" Shuichi echoed. He didn't really seem the type to be into peaches… But he didn't really know Kokichi that well, in the end. "What do you mean by 'jot that down'? Are you going to make me buy you desserts every day?"

"Yeah, peach! A real good friend of mine kinda got me hooked on them, you know. And wow, Shumai! What an incredible offer! I think that sounds like a great idea!" Kokichi told him with a huge smile.

"N-No, that's not what I-"

"Don't you worry your pretty little head!" Kokichi interrupted. "I was just teasing, nishishi! Though I wouldn't be opposed if you were *really*

offering, of course."

"Ah, no… I'm sorry, but I don't think that quite fits into my budget," Shuichi told him with a nervous laugh. "But… Video games? And cake? That's really all you want?"

"Somethin' wrong with that?" Kokichi asked. He tilted his head a little bit, his eyes growing wider. "That's a pretty steep price just to lay off making fun of this melted candlestick for a day. So what were you expecting me to say, Saihara-chan? That I'd want you to rob a bank with me? Spray paint a big smiley face on the side of a building? Or maybe your thoughts were a little further south than that~"

"N-No!" Shuichi cried, his face heating up. "Don't say things like that! Y-You shouldn't ever say things like that! Especially not to people you just met! In front of other people you just met!"

"Boo, you're no fun," Kokichi pouted.

"What the hell is going on with you two…?" Kaito asked. Though Shuichi had *said* they'd just met, they certainly acted like long-time friends. Or… Well, after Kokichi's comment, perhaps a little more than just friends.

"We're besties!" Kokichi said before Shuichi could reply. "Isn't that right, Shumai?"

"We… We only met a few days ago," Shuichi reminded him.

"So? Who are your other friends?" Kokichi demanded. "Akamatsu-chan? Your mum? Haven't we had this conversation before, Blueberry-chan?"

"M-Maki is my friend too!" Shuichi said indignantly. "And… Ah, well, Momota-kun is more of an acquaintance I guess."

"Sure, but we could be pals, bro!" Kaito said, giving Shuichi a pat on the back that was *just* a little too hard.

"So you're saying I'm only your number three friend?" Kokichi asked Shuichi. He was pouting, his eyes filling up with crocodile tears. "How could you, Shumai?! I thought we had something!"

"N-Number three is still pretty good…" Shuichi mumbled.

“But-!”

“Hey! What’re you whining about, you little maggot?” Kaito demanded. “Number three is pretty high praise for someone you just met!”

“True,” Kokichi said, immediately recovering. “I guess I’m still ahead of you, Soul Patch.”

“Who are you calling Soul Patch, Grape Gremlin?!” Kaito exclaimed.

“Plus, you just admitted that I’m your friend!” Kokichi declared, pointing a finger straight at Shuichi and ignoring Kaito’s protests. “No escaping it now, Blueberry-chan! We’ll be besties before you know it! And it starts with cake and video games!”

“I… suppose that’s alright,” Shuichi said slowly. “But I’m going to be busy for the next-”

“My house on Saturday!” Kokichi interrupted. “I’ll leave you my address on another cup, so you’d better not throw it away, got it?”

“But I really-”

Kokichi sighed. “Listen up, you no-bake cheesecake. You need a break. I don’t care who you are. Working the way you do is just unhealthy!”

Shuichi blinked, a little surprised. Though he’d phrased it in a somewhat insulting manner, he was… caring for him. Again. Or so it seemed, anyways. Was he being genuine? He found himself hoping that he was…

“N-No-bake cheesecake is good though…” Shuichi mumbled. “It’s not much of an insult.” It was the only thing he managed to say with his thoughts so jumbled up.

“Are you coming to my house or not, you glass of muddy paint water?” Kokichi revised.

“I… Suppose one afternoon couldn’t hurt,” Shuichi said, giving in. Kokichi was right, after all. A break could be good. And maybe… Well, maybe he’d have fun.

“Good! Then it’s settled,” Kokichi said with a grin. “If you stand me up, I’ll never forgive you! Got it?”

“Y-Yeah, I got it,” Shuichi spluttered.

“Did we just watch Saihara get a date?” Kaito asked.

“I don’t *care* ,” Maki sighed.

“I-It’s not a date!” Shuichi cried.

“Yeah, Momo-chan!” Kokichi agreed. “Just bros bein’ dudes! Playing some video games! Five feet apart cuz they’re not gay!”

“That just makes it sound gay,” Kaito sighed.

“Oh well!” Kokichi said. His smile widened. “That’s your problem, then, I guess!”

“Right. In any case, that means you need to stop bickering with Momota-kun today, alright?” Shuichi reminded him.

“Mhmm! Yes, sir!” Kokichi said, giving him a salute. “Aha! And now I must bid you farewell!”

Shuichi watched as he pushed open the door to the back room, messed with something on the wall, and grabbed his bag. “...What?”

“Oh! Hey guys!”

Shuichi turned to see Makoto walking through the door, nose and cheeks a little pink from the cold weather. He was smiling at them, chipper as usual. And that also meant… Kokichi was off for the day.

“It’s nice to see you, Momota!” Makoto continued. “Are you going to be working here now? I got Kaede’s message saying she was going to be gone for a while, so it’d be fun if you were going to help out while she’s away!”

Shuichi frowned. So Makoto knew too? Why hadn’t she told him…? He felt his stomach sink. He hadn’t done anything, had he? Was she mad at him? She had probably just told her employees out of necessity, but what if-

“You slimy little bastard!” Kaito scolded, snapping Shuichi out of his thoughts. “You tricked Saihara into hanging out with you cuz you knew you’d be off soon!”

“Not my fault you clowns weren’t paying attention to the time,” Kokichi said, stepping out from behind the counter. “Smell ya later!”

The four watched as he pranced out the door, whistling a little tune as he did so. Shuichi felt like he should be annoyed, but… he found that he wasn't actually that upset by the idea of hanging out with Kokichi. It'd give him a chance to get to know him better, at least. Maybe it would help him start to unravel Kokichi and sort his thoughts out a little more.

"Did something happen?" Makoto asked.

"Shuichi made a deal with Kokichi to get him to stop fighting with Kaito for the day," Maki said, standing up. "But we'd forgotten that it wouldn't really matter because Kokichi would be off anyways."

"Ah… So you got the short end of the stick," Makoto said with a little laugh. "Well, it sounds like it wasn't too costly of a deal, so at least that's good!"

"Ever the optimist," Maki grumbled. "I'm going back to sleep."

"Goodnight, Harukawa!" Makoto called. "Sleep well!"

"I'll come back bright and early!" Kaito told her. "Don't you worry about a thing, Harumaki! I'll take care of the early birds!"

"...Thanks." With that, she disappeared up into the loft.

"So you're covering Kaede's early morning shift, then?" Makoto asked, turning to Kaito.

"Yeah, that's the plan," he said. "I couldn't make it in early enough today. Had something planned, and this was all kind of last minute."

"Well, it'll be a big help," Makoto said. "So thank you! Don't be afraid to call out if you need to; I'd be happy to cover some of your shifts."

"Oh, thanks, man!" Kaito exclaimed with a smile. "So long as I'm not sharing a shift with that Ouma guy anymore, I think I'll be alright." He paused. "What's up with him, anyways? Is he always like that?"

"I've never seen him do that kind of thing before," Shuichi told him. "Though, I haven't known him long."

"True," Makoto agreed. "Honestly, the only thing I've ever seen him do is dote on Saihara." He laughed. "Maybe you're just some kind of Ouma whisperer."

“That’s…” Not really a title he wanted, thanks. But maybe there was some truth to what Makoto was saying. Shuichi thought it was pretty safe to assume that Kokichi didn’t have many friends. Based on his reactions whenever he said anything nice to him and his generally, well, annoying attitude, he didn’t think it was likely that the boy was incredibly popular.

“Maybe if he spends more time with you he’ll stop being so irritating,” Kaito said with a grimace. “What was his problem, anyways? I didn’t even do anything to him, and he was starting arguments with me in any way he could…” Kaito sighed.

“He probably thinks it’s fun,” Makoto suggested. “You’re pretty passionate, Momota. I bet he thinks it’s entertaining to get a rise out of you.”

“Guess I’ll have to be the bigger man then,” Kaito said. He held his arm up in a flexing position. “Though, that won’t be too hard, I think. Dude’s a shrimp.”

“You’re also just… tall,” Makoto said with a nervous laugh.

“True. I could probably squash him like a fly if I wanted,” Kaito said. He laughed. “You really get along with that guy, Saihara?”

“Well… Yeah, I suppose I do,” Shuichi said. It felt strange admitting it out loud, and saying Kokichi was his friend had felt even stranger. But while he didn’t know exactly what the feeling was that had settled in his stomach, it wasn’t… bad. He didn’t hate it. Maybe he wasn’t so opposed to being Kokichi’s friend after all.

Kaito hummed, but didn’t say anything else. “Well, I’ve gotta take off. I’ve got classes starting soon. Nice to see you two!”

“See you later, Momota!” Makoto called after him.

“Yes, I hope your classes go well,” Shuichi added.

With a smile and a wave, Kaito was out the door, leaving just the two boys in the coffee shop.

“I’d better go as well,” Shuichi said sheepishly. “I’ve got a lot of new information I have to sort through at the office…”

“Ah, good luck!” Makoto told him. “I’ll see you tomorrow!”

Shuichi smiled and waved farewell, then headed back out to his car. What he'd said… It was… partially a lie. He *could* have stayed in the coffee shop if he'd really wanted to, but without Kaede or Kokichi there… Well, it was just a tiny bit awkward. Makoto was friendly, but he would be able to focus better in his office. He wanted to get a good amount of work done that night so that he could allow for Kokichi's inevitable distractions the next day.

Hm… When had he started compensating for Kokichi? Did he *want* to be? He hadn't really thought about it; it just seemed like the natural thing to do. He frowned, but brushed it off. Best not dwell on it. He was excited about the new development in his case, so he didn't feel particularly upset about the idea of having to work later that night anyways.

As he turned the light on in his investigation room, he noticed the sticky note he'd left on the table. *Kokichi Ouma.* He picked it up again and put it up in the top right hand corner of the board. Underneath it, he placed a new sticky note, written in Sharpie.

Cake and video games.

Chapter End Notes

> In regards to the usage of the word 'rat' in reference to Kaito and Kokichi:
>
> I am Asian, and I am well aware of the situation regarding this issue. I would advise everybody to research the history of the term and how it has been used harmfully towards not only Asians, but other minority groups as well. Please use your own critical thinking skills and judgement to decide whether or not you think it is appropriate to refer to someone as a 'rat', as it varies greatly on a case-by-case basis. Thank you.

Day Six

Chapter Notes

> Alright, alright. I know I said I wasn't going to write any more of this, but I did a lot of thinking, and that just didn't seem... fair. Instead, I decided I'd finish it, but take it in a different direction than I originally intended. Thank you all for bearing with me, and I hope you enjoy the rest of the chapters! ...No promises about how long it'll take to get them all out, though. ^^;;

Shuichi wasn't entirely sure what he was supposed to wear to Kokichi's house. Was he supposed to be casual? Like he normally was at the coffee shop? Surely Kokichi didn't want him to *dress up* . And why was he thinking so hard about it?! It wasn't like it was a date or anything!

He sighed, tugging at the collar of his button-up as he approached Kokichi's apartment building. Maybe his choice of shirt was a little too formal. Or maybe it just seemed like too much because of how nervous he was.

And why was he nervous?! It was just Kokichi. They hadn't known each other long, but Shuichi still felt like he knew the boy well enough to know that he wasn't some kind of serial killer. Kaede wouldn't have hired him if he were. And he *definitely* wasn't concerned about impressing him. Probably. So what was he so afraid of? Getting bested at League of Super Mario Emblem Hunter 2K19?

With a deep breath, Shuichi knocked on Kokichi's apartment door. It was flung open immediately, as if Kokichi had been waiting for him. The boy had a gigantic smile on his face. He was wearing a sweatshirt that looked like it was at least four sizes too big for him, and Shuichi couldn't help but think it was… kind of cute.

"Wow, you really brought me peach cake?!" Kokichi exclaimed, looking at the cake in Shuichi's hands. "A whole ass cake?! Shumai, you really outdid yourself."

"Ah… Well, I tried to make it myself, but that… didn't exactly go as planned," Shuichi admitted, stepping into Kokichi's apartment.

His apartment was… normal. More normal than Shuichi thought it would be, anyways. If anything, it was a little strange in the sense

that it *was* so normal. Some generic paintings had been hung up, and there were a few houseplants on average looking bookshelves, filled with books that Kokichi had probably never touched. A small, glass swan sat on the counter. It didn't seem as if Kokichi had added any kind of decoration he really liked. ...Aside from the clown mask on the wall, but Shuichi decided to ignore that.

"Burn-down-the-kitchen kinda guy, are ya?" Kokichi asked with a smirk. He plucked the cake out of Shuichi's hands and set it on the counter. "So then, who made this beauty?"

"I actually found someone who specialises in making peach pastries," Shuichi said. Kokichi raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, I was as confused as you are. She said something about her boyfriend being really into peaches…? But either way, her bakery is actually quite popular. She doesn't usually make cakes, but she helped me out anyways."

"Well that's nice of her," Kokichi said. "I'm honestly impressed. I only suggested it because I thought you wouldn't be able to manage getting it." He snickered.

"You mean, you don't actually like peaches?!" Shuichi groaned. All that effort...

"No, I do," Kokichi told him. "But if I was nicer, I'd have requested something second best."

"Oh, well in that case, she gave me some free buns, too," Shuichi said. "They're quite good. You should try them, since you like peaches so much."

"You mean you didn't save one for me?!" Kokichi demanded. "Blueberry-chan, you-!"

Shuichi interrupted by pulling a bun out of his pocket, unwrapping it, and shoving it into Kokichi's open mouth. Kokichi stared back at him with wide eyes as Shuichi gave him a satisfied smirk.

"I figured you'd say something like that," he told him. "So I came prepared."

Kokichi was so caught up in the fact that Shuichi had bothered to remember a detail about him that he could hardly even taste the bun in his mouth. He… cared? Not only did he pay attention enough to notice his speech patterns, but he'd come *prepared* ? They hardly even knew each other!

“The bun’s great,” Kokichi told him, trying to distract from his shock. “Probably cuz you didn’t make it, nishishi!”

“I’ve barely mentioned it, and you’re already teasing me about it?!” Shuichi cried.

“I bet you can’t even make an omelette!” Kokichi teased.

“O-Omelettes are difficult!” Shuichi spluttered, his face turning red. “A proper French omelette requires-”

“Shuichi can’t make an omelette!” Kokichi interrupted, poking his stomach. “Egg Boy! Egg Boy! Egg Boy!”

“Egg… Boy…?” For some reason, only Makoto came to mind.

“Anyways! Come on!” Kokichi said, grabbing Shuichi’s wrist and pulling him into another room.

Shuichi could tell immediately that it was his bedroom. He was relieved to see that it was decorated from floor to ceiling with all sorts of random looking things. There was a toy plane hanging from the ceiling, vinyl records mounted on the wall, CDs and video games stacked up on shelves and desks… The walls were almost completely covered in posters and photographs. A handful of them were of Kokichi himself. It was honestly a lot to take in. It was organised chaos, but Shuichi saw more of the chaos than the organisation.

One photo on the wall next to him particularly caught his attention. It was Kokichi and a girl, both of them wearing clown masks on the side of their heads. The same clown mask that he’d seen out in the front room. Both of them had huge smiles on their faces. Shuichi had never seen Kokichi look that happy before… But he wanted to.

“Who is this?” Shuichi asked, pointing to the picture.

Kokichi looked over to where he was pointing, though he honestly didn’t need to. “Obviously it’s me, moron,” Kokichi told him.

“Who’s the girl?” Shuichi persisted. He was undeterred by Kokichi’s bad attitude.

“Just someone I used to know,” Kokichi sighed, looking away.

“Used to?” Shuichi questioned. He looked closer. The girl had brown hair pulled into a ponytail and freckles. She had an arm hooked

around Kokichi's shoulders. They looked like they were close. Both of them were wearing checkered scarves, one that Shuichi noticed was hanging on the wall across the room.

"It doesn't matter," Kokichi said softly. "She's gone now."

"Gone?" Shuichi's eyebrows furrowed. Kokichi sounded awfully sad about it. As if he was upset about the loss of his friend.

"She left, okay?!" Kokichi snapped. Shuichi blinked, surprised, and Kokichi sighed. "I don't know why. She just disappeared one day. It doesn't matter though, I don't need her anyways. It was a long time ago, too."

"I'm sorry I asked," Shuichi murmured. He glanced at the photo again. Though Kokichi said he didn't need her, it was clear he still cared about her. He wouldn't have kept the photo, the mask, or the scarf up otherwise.

"Are you gonna play video games with me, or are you just gonna stand there and stare at a sixteen year old girl for the entire day?"

"D-Don't say it like that!" Shuichi cried, his face turning red. "I wasn't checking her out or anything!"

"I never said you were," Kokichi said, a sly grin spreading on his face. Shuichi's face immediately shifted to a deadpan expression, and Kokichi burst out laughing. "Come on, Shumai!" He started patting the bed next to him. "Sit down!"

"O-On your bed?" Shuichi asked.

"Well sure, why not?" Kokichi tilted his head a little bit, an innocent look on his face.

Shuichi narrowed his eyes. He knew. Of course he knew. He wasn't stupid. He was trying to make him flustered on purpose, wasn't he?

"We just met?" Shuichi said. "Isn't sitting right next to you a little weird?"

"We sat close together at the piano," Kokichi reminded him.

Shuichi hesitated, then sighed. In all honesty, he didn't *really* mind sitting so close to him. Kokichi, for being so scrawny and small, was pretty warm. And, admittedly, it felt nice to be close to another

person like that. Kokichi snuggled back into his pillows, and Shuichi did his best to relax as well.

“So, what do you wanna play?” Kokichi asked, looking over to Shuichi.

What did he want to play? Shuichi looked down at Kokichi, his expression telling the other boy everything he needed to know. Shuichi had absolutely no idea where to start with video games.

“Alright, well, you like puzzles, don’t you?” Kokichi asked.

“I… guess,” Shuichi said. “Depends on the puzzle.”

“We’ll start with a real simple one,” Kokichi told him, tossing him a small controller and starting a game called Puyo Puyo Tetris.

“Tetris?” Shuichi asked.

“Just read the tutorial,” Kokichi said dismissively. “I’m sure you’ll get the hang of it. It’s not that difficult.”

“Ah… Alright.”

Shuichi quickly found out that ‘not that difficult’ may have been an overestimate of his abilities. While the concept was, in fact, very simple, Shuichi was downright terrible at the game.

“H-How are you so good at this?!” Shuichi cried, desperately leaning to one side as if that would somehow help him. “The pieces come down too fast! I don’t have any time to think about where the best spot to put them is!”

“Then stop thinking, dipshit!” Kokichi said with a laugh as he won once again. “If you take too long to think about it, then it ends up in a bad spot anyways. So just go with your instinct! It usually works out.”

“Go with my instinct?” Shuichi echoed. He didn’t know if he’d ever really done that. But if it would save his pride a little bit, then it was more than worth it. And besides, it was only a video game. There were no real consequences, aside from Kokichi making fun of him.

“Just relax,” Kokichi told him as he started another game.

“Alright. Okay.”

Shuichi leaned forward, concentrating hard on the screen. The little blocks seemed to taunt him as they fell. Closer and closer and closer to the bottom of the screen. He tried to act without thinking too hard about it, but oftentimes he rethought his decision and started to change the block's position too late.

"I think I've been thoroughly defeated," Shuichi sighed after another round lost. "You've really got me beat, Ouma-kun."

"Kokichi."

"...Huh?"

"Will you call me Kokichi?"

Shuichi looked down at him again. He was gripping his controller tightly and staring hard at the screen, as if he was nervous about what Shuichi would say. It wasn't very often that people requested he call them by their given name, but Kokichi seemed so stressed out about his answer that there was no way he could deny him.

"Sure thing, Kokichi."

Kokichi smiled to himself, unaware that Shuichi was still watching him. Nobody had called him Kokichi in so long… It was nice to hear him say it. It almost made it seem like they were really friends.

"Well, I've got a game that might be more your pace," Kokichi told him. "But I'm only letting you play one puzzle! Otherwise you might not ever stop." He snickered.

Kokichi opened a game called Picross and tossed his controller over to Shuichi. "Have at it, kiddo," he told him, then sat back to watch Shuichi complete the puzzles. Kokichi didn't play Picross. In all honestly, he'd only downloaded it because he thought Shuichi would enjoy it.

"Oh, I get it," Shuichi mumbled. "This is easy."

Watching Shuichi play Picross was interesting. He was focused, and he was making an expression similar to the one he made when he was studying something for a case. But there was something… more relaxed about it. A little bit of a smile. A nod of approval whenever he completed a line.

"Ah! I did it!" he exclaimed. His eyes lit up and a smile grew on his

face as he looked to Kokichi, only to find that he was already looking at him.

“Good job, Shu-i-chi!” Kokichi exclaimed. Seeing Shuichi get so excited was making him feel irrationally happy.

“A-Ah… Thank you,” Shuichi stuttered out. He’d been surprised that Kokichi had called him Shuichi, though he supposed he should have expected it. Still though, it left him rather flustered.

“Oh, did you not like that?” Kokichi asked. “I can just stick to-”

“N-No!” Shuichi interrupted. “I… I liked it.” He looked off to the side, avoiding Kokichi’s gaze.

Kokichi laughed. “Alright, Shumai,” he said. “So what did you think of the game?”

“It’s fun,” Shuichi said with a smile. “At first, I was a little surprised that you got such a good read on me, but I guess I *am* a little predictable.” He laughed nervously.

“You can say that again,” Kokichi said. He took the controller back from Shuichi and closed the game. “So, what should we play next?”

“Hmm…” Shuichi thought for a moment. He couldn’t tell if Kokichi kept asking him to choose out of politeness or because he wanted to see him squirm in his lack of knowledge. Either way, the best answer he could give was a vague one. “How about we start with popular ones,” he suggested. “So I at least know what’s going on if someone pulls out a party game at Christmas.”

Kokichi laughed. “Wow, that might be the lamest thing you have ever said,” he told him.

“Lame?!” Shuichi cried. “W-What?!”

“You’re such an old man,” Kokichi snickered. “Maybe you should invite me to Christmas so I can cover for your ass.”

Shuichi let out a little laugh. “Yeah, I’m sure my aunt would love you.”

Kokichi raised an eyebrow, looking back at Shuichi as he popped Mario Party into the Switch. Shuichi thought his aunt would like him? Shuichi thought… anybody would like him? He was likeable?

...It had to be because they'd only just met. He was sure that as soon as he let Shuichi see more of himself that Shuichi wouldn't hold such a high opinion of him.

Did he… want Shuichi to hold a high opinion of him?

"She'd think you're funny," Shuichi elaborated. "You'd like her too, I think."

"Wow, Shu-chan!" Kokichi exclaimed, snuggling up next to him. "I had no idea you wanted to move this relationship along so quickly! Already suggesting I meet your family…! You really don't mess around!"

"H-Huh?! You're the one that suggested it!" Shuichi cried, his face turning red. "And this isn't a-! We're just-!"

"Gosh, Blueberry-chan, your reaction is a little dramatic to be the truth," Kokichi teased. "You sure you're not interested in me?" He gave the boy a smirk.

"Of course I'm interested," Shuichi told him seriously.

Kokichi's eyes grew wide. He what? He was interested? And he said it without hesitation either! Was he-

"Interested in kicking your ass."

...Oh.

Kokichi deflated a little. He didn't understand why he was so disappointed. Was *he* interested in *Shuichi* ? He looked over to him, seeing that he was giving him a little smirk. Kokichi's stomach sank as he realised that maybe he was in over his head. Maybe he really *was* interested in Shuichi. Maybe this wasn't just a game anymore. Maybe he was starting to get a little bit of a crush.

"Was it really so weird for me to make a joke?" Shuichi asked with a nervous laugh. Kokichi's silence had made him too nervous to keep up the teasing.

"Yeah!" Kokichi blurted a little too quickly. He was desperate to cover his tracks. "I didn't think you had it in you, Shumai!"

What about Shuichi made him so unable to keep his composure?! Ever since he'd met him, he'd had so many slip-ups he couldn't even

begin to count them all. In six days, Shuichi knew more about Kokichi than people who had known him for six *years* . Every time he got a little flustered… Every time Shuichi said something that surprised him… His facade was cracking.

And the girl… He hadn't meant to tell him about the girl, and he *certainly* hadn't meant to get so emotional about it. Though he hadn't told him much, he didn't want to tell him anything at all. But at the same time… he felt almost as if he *did* want to tell him more. He felt compelled to pour his heart out about the best friend that left him so cruelly, but he couldn't figure out why. He wondered if Shuichi had this effect on everybody.

"Well, I hear Mario Party is a lot of luck," Shuichi said awkwardly, snapping Kokichi out of his thoughts. He could tell Kokichi had gotten uncomfortable, though he wasn't really sure why. "I might actually have a chance at winning this one."

"As if!" Kokichi cried, suddenly back to his normal self. "Mario Party is *not* all luck! You have to be good at the mini games to win, you walnut!"

"Well we'll just have to see about that, won't we?"

"You're on!"

It was a relief to Shuichi to find out that Mario Party was basically just a board game. Conceptually, it was simple. The minigames were simple. The longer he played, the more stupid he felt for having really bad hand-eye coordination. He was managing, but Kokichi was so much better than him at all the minigames that it almost burned. He made it look like it all came so naturally to him, and it probably did.

"Wait, what?!" Kokichi cried. "How did you get that star?!"

"You were too busy paying attention to your own pursuit of victory to realise that I was coming from behind," Shuichi said triumphantly.

"Well it doesn't matter!" Kokichi huffed. "That was the last turn, and I still have more stars than you. So clearly this game *is* a matter of skill!"

"What are bonus stars?" Shuichi asked.

"...Huh?" Kokichi looked to the screen, mortified to learn that they

were, in fact, awarding bonus stars. How had he forgotten about that?!

“Kokichi, I think I won,” Shuichi said. He looked shocked.

“No fair! That was pure luck!” Kokichi whined.

“You’re the one that said it was skill alone that decided the winner,” Shuichi reminded him, giving him a little smile. “So you’re either gonna have to admit you’re wrong or admit defeat.”

“F-Fine, I was wrong!” Kokichi said with a pout.

Shuichi laughed. His eyes lit up and a big smile grew on his face as he did so, looking at Kokichi with something like fondness in his eyes. Kokichi was like a little kid at times, but it was kind of endearing. The fact that he’d rather admit he was wrong than admit he lost fair and square to a first-timer was incredibly amusing.

Kokichi looked back at Shuichi as he laughed. He looked happy. Genuinely happy. Relaxed and carefree and content. It was a look he had rarely seen, and it made his heart squeeze a little. He… liked seeing Shuichi happy. He wanted him to be happy more often. And he wanted him to be happy with *him* .

The two continued to cycle through video games well into the night. They quickly learned that Shuichi was *not* a natural talent. Kokichi smoked him in almost every single game they played. It was a relief when he finally whipped out a game called Animal Crossing that was nothing more than running around an island catching fish and talking to animals. Shuichi liked that one in particular. He even considered getting it for himself.

When they’d gone through all the multiplayer games Kokichi had, they’d moved onto single player games. Shuichi felt a little selfish making Kokichi watch, but Kokichi insisted that he was content. And he was. Watching Shuichi’s face twist up in frustration as he struggled was funny, and seeing him smile and get excited about finally accomplishing something made the butterflies in his stomach go absolutely wild.

They’d ordered takeout in the evening, content to stay snuggled up next to each other, sampling game after game after game. Shuichi hadn’t even realised that he might have overstayed his welcome until it was nearly one in the morning, and he was yawning more than he was speaking.

“You gettin’ tired, Shumai?” Kokichi asked. He gave him a knowing smile.

“Maybe a little,” Shuichi admitted. “I didn’t mean to stay so long. Sorry about that.” He laughed nervously.

“No way!” Kokichi argued. “If I wanted you to leave, you’d know. I’d have kicked you out already.”

Shuichi laughed again. “Okay, okay. I should probably… be getting home now though.” Although he said it, he didn’t make any move to get up off the bed.

“Nah, that’s alright,” Kokichi said, waving him off. “You can sleep here tonight. I don’t mind. You’re too tired to make it home safely by yourself, and I don’t really feel like taking you home.”

“How kind,” Shuichi deadpanned. Though, he supposed it *was* incredibly kind of Kokichi to allow him to stay. Or to allow him to come over in the first place.

“I know!” Kokichi exclaimed with a smile. “You’re pretty lucky, you know. I don’t usually let people come over, let alone stay the night!”

“I must be pretty special, then,” Shuichi mumbled, sleep taking over as he shifted around, lying flatter on Kokichi’s bed.

“Yeah… You must be,” Kokichi said softly. Shuichi was so tired, he probably wouldn’t remember anything Kokichi said anyways.

“Thank you, Kokichi,” Shuichi said. His eyes were closed, but there was a smile on his face. “This was really fun. I think I really needed this.” He paused. “I… I’m really glad we’re friends.”

Kokichi’s heart was pounding so hard he thought it might beat right out of his chest. “Yeah. I am too, Shu-chan.”

Oh boy. He was in deep.

Day Seven

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shuichi groaned, snuggling up closer to the pillow he was lying with. Sleep still had a tight grip on him, but he was just aware enough to feel the sun on his face, streaming through the window. The bed he was in was warm, and the pillow he was clinging to was… harder than most pillows? And… also warm? And…

Oh god. It wasn't a pillow.

Shuichi shot up in bed, looking around him frantically as he realised he was still in Kokichi's room. In his bed. And the pillow he was holding onto so tightly was-

"Why'd you mooove!" Kokichi whined, sitting up next to him. He was pouting at him, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "I was comfy, you know!"

"W-Why were you-?! Why am I-?! D-Did you sleep with me?! Why am I still here?!" Shuichi cried.

"Jeez, Shu-chan, calm down," Kokichi said, yawning. "Do you not remember anything from last night? You were practically falling asleep playing Kingdom Hearts."

"I… was?"

"Yeah." Kokichi stretched his arms above his head. "I told you that you could stay the night, and you basically fell asleep on the spot."

"Oh… Right." Okay. He *did* remember that.

"I was gonna get up and leave so I could sleep on the couch, but you grabbed my arm and pulled me into bed with you before I could," Kokichi continued. "I tried to squirm away, but you were clinging to me so tightly and you looked so relaxed, I just…" He frowned. "Even after you'd fallen asleep completely, I didn't want to leave you."

"I… did that?" Okay. He *didn't* remember *that* .

"You were really cuddly, you know," Kokichi said with a snicker.

“But you seemed pretty content. You sure you don’t have anything you wanna tell me?”

“Well… I did sleep really well,” Shuichi admitted, Kokichi’s teasing flying right over his head because he was still so sleepy. “I slept… better than I ever have, actually.”

“Maybe you should come sleep here every night,” Kokichi said, laughing at him.

“I would if I could,” Shuichi sighed.

Kokichi nearly choked. He *what* ?!

“Don’t look so surprised,” Shuichi said with a smile, looking over at him. “I told you last night that I had a lot of fun. And… Well, you’re really warm.” Kokichi raised an eyebrow. “I-I mean-! I mean I-! Ahh…”

Kokichi burst out laughing. “Okay, Shumai!” He gave him a smile. “Well, you’re welcome over whenever ya want. ‘S not like anybody else is ever here, so.”

Shuichi’s face fell. Kokichi… didn’t have any friends? He had figured he didn’t have *many*, but… He had so many photos of people with him on his walls. What had happened to all of them? Looking at Kokichi, he noticed that his face had fallen a bit as well. It didn’t take a genius to start putting the pieces together, and as he did so, it left his heart aching.

“Let’s make it a regular thing, then,” Shuichi suggested. “I’ll be here as often as you want.”

He wasn’t really sure why he said it. He *did* have fun with him the previous night, but… They still weren’t that good of friends, were they? Or were they? They *had* slept together, he supposed. And he couldn’t deny that, despite the fact that they’d only known each other a week, he felt like he’d grown oddly close to the boy. Like they shared some kind of special bond even though they didn’t know much about each other.

“Thanks, Shuichi,” Kokichi said.

“Sure,” Shuichi returned with a smile. He stood up from the bed, shivering at the sudden coldness that surrounded him. “I’d better get going, though. What time is it, anyways?”

“Like noon,” Kokichi told him, throwing his sweatshirt at him.

Shuichi pulled the sweatshirt off of his face, giving Kokichi an inquisitive look. “Thanks,” he said, a little surprised Kokichi had been so considerate… or even noticed that he was cold. “And it’s noon? Jeez…” He pulled the hoodie over his head and ran a hand through his hair to settle it again.

“Not used to sleeping in so late?” Kokichi asked. He tried not to think about how much his stomach churned looking at Shuichi in his jacket.

“Or so long,” Shuichi sighed. “Maybe I should get a pillow to hug.” He laughed.

“You could get one of those anime girl body pillows,” Kokichi said with a snicker. “Don’t worry, I’ll help you pick one out!”

“W-What?!” Shuichi cried. “No!”

Kokichi started laughing at him in earnest, eyes closed and head tilted back. His laugh was light and a little airy, and Shuichi figured that his normal semi-wicked cackle was somewhat fake. When Kokichi stopped laughing a little and looked back at him, his eyes were soft, and the smile still hadn’t left his face. Shuichi couldn’t help but feel like he’d gotten to see a lot of who Kokichi really was. And he… liked it.

“You’re a real hoot, Blueberry-chan!” Kokichi told him. “Now c’mon. At least let me make you lunch before you leave.”

“You can cook?” Shuichi asked.

“I’m still surprised that you *can’t* , considering you live on your own,” Kokichi said. “Unless you have a surprise roommate?” He turned to look back, expecting to see Shuichi behind him, but the detective was still back in his room it seemed. “Shumai?”

“Ah! Sorry,” Shuichi said, rushing out of Kokichi’s room. “Had to find my phone. And no, I live by myself,” he confirmed. “And I *can* cook. Some things. I manage.”

“You *manage* ?” Kokichi echoed. He sighed, shaking his head as he pulled open his fridge. “But think of all the things you’re missing out on! Maybe you should learn how to cook properly.”

“Would you teach me?”

Kokichi froze, then slowly turned around to look back at Shuichi. The other boy was looking right back at him, not a hint of insincerity on his features. He was… being serious? No way. There was no way he'd really want that.

"Are you for real?" Kokichi asked, giving him a look.

"I-I mean-! If you don't want to, then just say so!" Shuichi spluttered. "I just thought maybe-! I mean I-! If we just play video games every time we-!" His face was turning so red Kokichi thought he might explode.

"Whoa, whoa! Slow your roll, Shu-chan!" Kokichi said, holding his hands out in front of him. "I don't mind at all! I just thought I annoyed you too much. And, well, I'm probably not a very good teacher."

"You *do* annoy me," Shuichi said as he sat down at a barstool, but the smile on his face let Kokichi know he wasn't being too serious. "But something about you is different right now. Last night, too. It's like you're more… real."

Oh no.

"Ahaha! What are you talking about, Shumai?" Kokichi asked, turning back to the fridge to hide his burning face. "You must be crazy. Are you sure you got enough sleep?"

"Say what you will, but I'm a detective for a reason," Shuichi said with a shrug. "At first, I thought you were an enigma. Something I could never possibly hope to understand. And maybe to some extent, you still are. But I think the pieces are finally starting to fall into place."

Kokichi remained silent, pulling some food out of his fridge and finally closing it again. He didn't know what to say. He didn't even know how he felt about Shuichi's comment. Was he okay with him figuring out his whole scheme? Did it matter? He would probably just leave like the rest of them, anyways…

"I won't push it," Shuichi continued. "I can tell you don't like to talk about it, especially with me. We're not very good friends yet, after all. But... There's a reason you act like you don't care about anything or anyone, right? That's fine. But after yesterday… I've decided that I'm not giving up on you. No matter what."

Shuichi frowned, his eyes falling from the back of Kokichi's head and down to the countertop in front of him. He'd spoken without thinking for once in his life, and was a little surprised at his words. He was kind of just thinking out loud, and he'd expected to regret that, but strangely… he didn't. He *had* decided, consciously or not, that he wasn't going to leave Kokichi. No matter what the boy did to him. Even if he never opened up and let him see what he was hiding under all the petty insults and chaos.

"W-Well, good luck with that, loser," Kokichi stuttered out.

There was no conviction in his voice, and he knew Shuichi could tell he wasn't being honest, but he didn't know what else to say. Shuichi saying that to him made his heart clench. People hardly ever told him that, especially with that much sincerity. But regardless, even when they did, they always left him in the end anyways. So why would Shuichi be any different?

Kokichi may have been starting to really, actually, honestly like him, but he just couldn't afford to let anybody else break his already broken heart. He wouldn't allow it. He *couldn't* allow it. No matter how badly he wanted things to be different.

"Thanks," Shuichi said. Kokichi had been standing motionless for a few moments, and Shuichi figured he needed something to snap him out of his own thoughts. "So what are you going to make?"

"Mac and cheese!" Kokichi exclaimed. Regardless of however he had been feeling the moment before, it appeared as if he'd fully recovered.

"Mac and cheese?" Shuichi echoed, watching Kokichi buzz around the kitchen, getting more food and all sorts of kitchen utensils out. Was all that necessary for mac and cheese? And besides that, was this his idea of cooking? Was he twelve??

"Not from a box, you heathen," Kokichi said, pointing a spoon at him. He set some cheese and a grater in front of him. "I assume you at least know how to grate cheese."

"I mean, I'm not stupid," Shuichi said with a nervous laugh.

"I know!" Kokichi exclaimed with a big smile. "I'd never let you live it down if the man who solves cold cases didn't even know how to shred some cheddar."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," Shuichi sighed, though a smile was still

present on his face.

He got up to wash his hands, and as he turned around to ask where a towel was, Kokichi threw the one he'd just used at his face. Shuichi pulled it off and gave him a pout, but Kokichi just laughed at him.

With the mood lightened, the two got to work making lunch for themselves. In all honesty, Shuichi didn't do much other than grate the cheese, but Kokichi let him stand next to him and watch him work. Something about a sliver of his immense talent rubbing off on him if he stood close enough and watched.

Somewhere in the back of Shuichi's mind, he knew that actual mac and cheese wasn't made from artificial cheese powder, but to see it done right in front of him made it feel like he hadn't. In fact, spending time with Kokichi made him realise that there were a *lot* of things he didn't know. He had spent so much time focusing on school and work, that in becoming a renowned private investigator, he'd neglected the other aspects of his life.

The food was finished in hardly any time at all, and Shuichi hadn't realised how hungry he really was until it was sitting in front of him, making his mouth water. He was surprised at how good it was. He'd watched Kokichi make it, of course, but somehow he expected something to still go wrong.

"Are you sure you didn't, like, add drugs to this?" Shuichi asked, placing his bowl in the dishwasher when they'd finished eating.

"I don't have drugs here!" Kokichi retorted. "Honestly, Shumai, who do you think I am? Maybe I've vandalised a few things, but I don't mess with drugs!"

Shuichi laughed. "I'm just teasing." He gave Kokichi a smile. "Thank you for lunch. And for yesterday. And for allowing me to stay here…"

"Sure, sure," Kokichi said dismissively. "I mean, we're friends now, right? That's just what friends do."

Though he hadn't asked, Shuichi could hear the question in his answer. "Right. We're friends now," Shuichi affirmed. "We have been, I think. And that won't change, no matter what you believe. I promise."

"Yeah," Kokichi said, slamming the dishwasher closed a little too

hard.

“Well, I… guess I’ll see you tomorrow, then?” Shuichi asked. “At Brioso, that is,” he added hastily. He wasn’t planning on coming back *that* soon. Or maybe he should invite Kokichi to *his* apartment the next time…

“Yeah! See you tomorrow!” Kokichi exclaimed, giving him a smile and a wave. “Akamatsu-chan said she’d be gone still, but hopefully that doesn’t mean Momo-chan will come back.” He glared. “I really can’t stand that guy.”

“Well, Maki said you’ll have different shifts normally, right?” Shuichi asked. “So hopefully he’ll be just leaving when you get there tomorrow.” He paused. “And… if it helps, I’ll be there soon after you.”

“Of course it helps, you limp wingnut!” Kokichi told him. “Seeing you is like the best part of my day, you know! Nothing makes me happier than pestering my darling detective, nishishi!”

Shuichi let out an unenthusiastic laugh. “Glad to be of service.”

“Mhmm!” Kokichi gave him a sly smile. “Not like you mind, though.”

“I’m not sure what you’re trying to imply, but whatever it is? *N o* .” Shuichi gave him a deadpan look.

“Whateeever you say,” Kokichi drawled, folding his hands behind his head. “Are you good, or do you need me to walk you to the station, too?”

“I know how to get to the station, but thanks for your generosity,” Shuichi said with a roll of his eyes.

“Anything for my Shu-chan!” Kokichi exclaimed.

Shuichi sighed. “Alright, Kokichi. Thanks again, for letting me come over.”

“I should be thanking *you* ,” Kokichi argued. “It seemed like something you’d be averse to, so really *you’re* the one who went out of your way.”

“Maybe,” Shuichi admitted. “But I’m glad I came.” He looked right at Kokichi. “Really, I am.”

“S-Shut up!” Kokichi cried. He couldn’t take it anymore. If Shuichi said one more nice thing to him, he’d break down. He almost preferred it when Shuichi was blowing him off and acting like he was his biggest problem in the world.

“See you tomorrow, Kokichi,” Shuichi said, giving him a wave and stepping out the door.

“Yeah… Tomorrow…” Kokichi mumbled, but he wasn’t really paying attention.

Kokichi watched the door close behind him. Listened to his footsteps get fainter and fainter until he couldn’t hear them anymore. He waited a few more moments just to be safe, and then let out a yell.

“AHHHHHH!” he cried, falling over and burying his face in one of the pillows in his couch. Shuichi was going to be the death of him.

He sighed, got up, and walked back into his room to make sure Shuichi hadn’t left anything and to make his bed again. Because Shuichi was holding onto him so fiercely, he hadn’t squirmed all over the place and knocked all his sheets to the floor, at least. Maybe he could be lazy and get away with just leaving it as it was.

As he stepped into the room, something on the TV caught his eye. Sitting right in the center of it was a single purple sticky note. He couldn’t recall putting one there. Had Shuichi done it? He shuffled over to it and pulled it off the screen, taking a closer look at it.

A single phone number stared back at him. There was no name with it, but Kokichi recognised Shuichi’s elegant, cobweb-like handwriting, and figured it had to be his. A smile grew on Kokichi’s face as he looked at it. It wasn’t a call or even a text, but he supposed that getting Shuichi’s number like that was definitely the next best thing.

Shuichi took the bus to his office instead of back to his apartment. He had left all of his work materials there Friday night so he wouldn’t be able to obsess over them while he was supposed to be taking a break. At first, it drove him a little bonkers, but he quickly distracted himself with a mystery novel he’d been meaning to read. And, of course, Kokichi kept him distracted as well. The break had been… nice. Refreshing.

In fact, stepping into his office again felt a little suffocating. As he flicked on the lights, it felt as if the stress already had him in a chokehold. Every step he took towards the investigation room felt

heavier, and as he cracked open the door it was as if a wave of exhaustion had already hit him in the face.

He sighed, looking up at his board. The files and sticky notes he'd put up on it hadn't moved since he'd last visited them. He didn't have much to add, but he supposed it wouldn't hurt to reorganise his thoughts a bit. There was still a fair amount of information up that he didn't need anymore.

As he began to reorganise his board, he caught sight of the sticky notes sitting at the top right hand corner. *Kokichi Ouma* and *Cake and video games* . He smiled to himself, reaching to pull another sticky note out of his pants pocket and only then realising that he was still wearing Kokichi's sweatshirt. He shook it off with a laugh and pulled the sticky note out anyways.

It was the one Kokichi had given him a few days before. *Remember to take care of yourself* . It had since lost its stick, of course, so Shuichi grabbed a piece of tape and stuck it up on the board next to the other two sticky notes. He regarded them for a moment before grabbing a pad of blank ones and a Sharpie.

Hides his feelings.

Lost a friend. A lot of friends?

Brown haired girl with freckles - friend from high school.

Tries to push everybody away.

Makes good mac and cheese.

Loves peaches.

Teaching me how to take a break.

Doesn't want to get close to anybody because he's afraid they'll leave him (?).

My friend.

Shuichi stood back, looking at the handful of sticky notes that now occupied a fair amount of space on his board. Kokichi was a mystery he was beginning to unravel, but more importantly, Kokichi was a friend he was beginning to care for. He wanted to understand him. He wanted to be there for him. The two of them may not have many

friends, but they would have each other.

Somehow, the notion didn't make him sick to his stomach. If someone had told him a week prior that he'd learn to like the little gremlin in only seven days, he'd have told them they were out of their mind. But, nevertheless, that was the situation he had found himself in. He and Kokichi were stuck with each other, for better or for worse.

Turning the lights off in the investigation room, Shuichi left his things lying on the table. He could pick them up in the morning. As he locked the front door to his office, content in taking some time to himself that night, he couldn't help but feel like his friendship with Kokichi would make the both of them a little bit better.

Chapter End Notes

> I just wanted to note that I super apologise if there's a weird downgrade in quality of new chapters. My beta reader lowkey (high key) disappeared, so we're FLYIN' SOLO NOW, BOYS! YEEHAW!!!
>
> (I don't actually know anything about what's up with my beta reader, but I know she's at least alive, so don't worry! ^^;;)

Day Eight

Chapter Notes

TrashyRacoon, do I have some good news for you-

"SHU-CHAAAN!"

Shuichi jumped, startled by Kokichi's sudden and very loud call of his name. Admittedly, he probably should have seen it coming, but he had been so caught up in the bliss of having done absolutely no work all weekend that for a moment he lived in a world where Kokichi wouldn't scream at him as soon as he walked in the door.

"Good morning, Kokichi," Shuichi greeted with a nervous smile. He approached the counter and sat down at one of the bar stools.

"So you guys are on a first name basis now, huh?" Kaito asked. He was just coming out of the back room, a container full of coffee beans in his hands.

"That's right!" Kokichi exclaimed. "Shumai and I are *very* close now. We had some *excellent* bonding time this weekend! Nishishi!"

Kaito raised an eyebrow, giving Shuichi an inquisitive look as he set the beans down on the counter. "Did you guys…?"

"N-No!" Shuichi cried. He could feel his cheeks turning red almost immediately. Leave it to Kokichi to make it sound like they'd fooled around…

"Aww, don't be like that, Shu-chan!" Kokichi whined. A sly grin spread across his face. "We *did* sleep together, after all."

Kaito choked on a drink of water, and Shuichi gave Kokichi an exasperated look.

"So you *did* sleep together?" Kaito asked. He looked like he was trying not to be repulsed. "Were you just embarrassed, Saihara?"

"No," Shuichi sighed, rubbing his temples. "I just fell asleep on his bed, that's all."

"Yeah, and then you grabbed my hand and pulled me in with you!" Kokichi added with a snicker. "You clung to me like a koala all

night! You're pretty cute when you sleep, you know. Even if you mumble about the most *boring* things."

"I… mumble about things in my sleep?" Shuichi asked. Even in school, he never had any friends close enough to have overnights with. He'd never slept in the same room as someone before, so he'd never known.

"Yeah you do," Kokichi told him, turning around to start making Shuichi a coffee. "You were playing sudoku or something. Kept saying stuff about nines and threes, and they couldn't go there, or they could go here… It put me to sleep!"

Kaito watched Kokichi silently as he worked. Though he was a little obnoxious, it was clear that he really cared about Shuichi. Even as he made fun of his sleep talking habits, the smile on his face was soft. His expression was relaxed, and his eyes held a fondness Kaito thought he was incapable of.

"You're making fun of me for dreaming about sudoku, but you're the one who recognised it based on gameplay alone," Shuichi teased, resting his chin on his hand.

Kaito noted that, similarly to Kokichi, his expression was soft. Maki had told him that Shuichi was always either nervous or serious, so seeing him look at Kokichi with the most affectionate smile he'd seen in weeks was a little bit of a surprise to him. The two didn't seem like they'd get along well, and they hadn't known each other long, but it was clear even to Kaito that they had something special.

"Listen, sometimes those free old person mobile games just call to me!" Kokichi explained, sliding Shuichi his coffee. Shuichi noted with a smile that it was black. "Sudoku, solitaire, crosswords… They're all pretty boring, though. Just like Momo-chan!"

"Hey!" Kaito cried indignantly.

"Oh, that's right," Shuichi cut in before an argument could start. "Weren't you supposed to be working the early shift, Momota-kun?"

"Yeah! Why am I stuck working with you *again* ?" Kokichi whined. "On Friday and Saturday I got to have the place to myself!"

"It's not like I enjoy it any more than you," Kaito said with a glare. "There are supposed to be two people working during the day. Maki and I will handle the early morning shift, then it's Ouma and I, and

then Naegi and Hina after us. Maki works the late shift alone since there isn't much business then."

"Who the heck is Hina?" Kokichi asked before Shuichi could say anything. "And why wasn't I told about all this?"

"Maki doesn't have your phone number, idiot," Kaito said. "And Hina is one of Naegi's friends. She's available for the next week or so, so she agreed to help out while Akamatsu is gone. Unless you want to work another shift…?"

"Nah," Kokichi declined. "Naegster is nice and all, but I've got stuff to do. And I don't really need the money, anyways." He started rolling a pen around on the counter as if he were bored by the conversation.

"You don't?" Shuichi asked. "Actually, now that I think about it, how do you even afford that apartment? I know Kaede pays well, but you only work like six hours a day…"

"That's a secret, Blueberry-chan!" Kokichi answered, pointing the pen at Shuichi. He gave the other boy a grin that made Shuichi's stomach sink.

"I should have known," Shuichi sighed, but he thought he had a pretty good idea of what Kokichi was implying. He may have been a man of the law, but he thought it was probably *better* to look the other way in Kokichi's case.

"So, whatcha got goin' on today, Shumai?" Kokichi asked. He stood across the counter from Shuichi, leaning in close so their noses were nearly touching.

"A-Ah!" Shuichi leaned back so far and so quickly that he nearly fell over backwards off the stool. He glared at Kokichi as he stabilised himself again, but Kokichi only gave him a big grin as a response.

"Is it really that scary?" Kokichi asked. "Wrow! Must be thrilling! Is the murderer still on the loose? Are you going to have to chase after them?!"

"No," Shuichi said with a pout. Kokichi had backed off to a reasonable distance again, and Shuichi righted himself. "Well, there *may* still be a murderer on the loose. I suppose that's still a possibility. But I *won't* be chasing after anybody. That's not the lead I'm following right now."

“Oh? But would you if it was?” Kokichi asked, raising a brow. “Wow! My darling detective, on the run! A thrilling chase! I can just imagine it…!” He looked off to the side and waved a hand from left to right in front of him as if he were throwing up a picture for the other two to see.

“My life isn’t a movie, you know,” Shuichi reminded him, though the smile on his face let the other boy know he was teasing.

“Even if it was, I know it wouldn’t be a nail-biter detective film,” Kokichi told him with a grin.

“With the way you two are acting, it would probably be a romcom,” Kaito quipped with a roll of his eyes. “Honestly, watching the two of you is almost making me sick.”

“Then leave!” Kokichi exclaimed, giving him a closed-eyed smile.

“No, actually, I should be the one leaving,” Shuichi argued. He stood up and grabbed his coffee. “I’ve gotta get at least *some* work done today, after all.”

“Bye, Shumai! Good luck on your case!” Kokichi called after him. Shuichi gave him a smile and a nod over his shoulder as he retreated back into the corner of the shop.

Neither Kokichi nor Kaito missed the fact that he hadn’t rejected Kaito's romcom joke. Kaito looked to Kokichi, giving him an inquisitive look. Kokichi just shrugged. Not even he knew why Shuichi wouldn’t have commented on it. Was it because he was interested? ...Nah, he probably just knew it was a joke and brushed it off as such.

Shuichi took a deep breath, sinking down into his usual armchair as he set his coffee down on the table in front of him. He didn’t bother pulling anything out of his bag aside from the phone he’d taken from the victim’s room. He turned it on again, opening up the messaging app.

He’d read through all the messages on the phone the previous Friday. The first ones dated back to a few months before the victim had died. The messages with all three of the contacts on the phone had all but confirmed that the death had, in fact, been a suicide. Some of the messages were incredibly disturbing, and Shuichi had been surprised that they hadn’t haunted him all weekend. Kokichi… was a pretty good distraction. Whether or not that was a good thing wholly

depended on the day.

The victim's ex boyfriend had already told the police department that the two had broken up nearly a year prior to the incident. He had claimed that the breakup had been smooth and mutual, and that the two had remained friends after the fact. Messages between the two of them on the victim's original cell phone had confirmed that, and the messages on the one Shuichi had recovered did nothing to dispute it.

The messages between the victim and her ex boyfriend as well as the messages between the victim and her best friend were relatively normal for correspondences between a suicidal young adult and their friends. The victim had confided in both of them frequently, always receiving support and love from the two, who urged her to stay safe and even offered to come stay with her if she needed it.

The messages with the person saved as "Unknown" were what concerned him. The victim had confided in them as well, and the person had seemed nice enough, but had also done nothing but support what the victim was saying. If she said that she wanted to hurt herself, Unknown would say, "If that's what you think is best," or, "Do whatever makes you feel better." The messages were all encouraging and supportive in nature, but they were encouraging and supportive… of the wrong things.

The very last couple weeks of their messages were what concerned him the most. That's when the victim had told Unknown that they were suicidal. Unknown had replied in their normal way. "I'll support you no matter what." "Let me know if I can do anything for you." Which could be taken multiple ways. It wasn't much to go off of. However, Unknown had then helped the victim plan the act, even encouraging her to follow through if that's what she truly wanted. Apparently Unknown had been the one to provide the victim with her ex boyfriend's knife. This person could be charged with manslaughter in the second degree. It was a very serious issue, and it stressed Shuichi out immensely.

Shuichi had spoken to the victim's parents briefly on Friday. They had the information they'd wanted from the case: who had killed their daughter. However, when Shuichi told them about the Unknown person, they'd implored that he figure out who that was. They even insisted they compensate him more for his time, but he refused. To him, this was all part of the original case. He wasn't about to quit.

"Wrow, Shumai. Texting on the job?"

Shuichi jumped, looking up at Kokichi. The boy was approaching him, a pastry in hand. Shuichi blinked up at him as he set the apple turnover down on the table in front of him. Did Kokichi just want an excuse to come see him…? It hadn't been that long, had it?

"Are you slacking off?" Kokichi persisted when Shuichi didn't answer. "You don't even have any work materials out yet! It's been almost an hour, you know."

"An hour…?" Shuichi echoed. He glanced at a clock on the wall and realised Kokichi was right. He really *had* spent an hour reading and re-reading the messages in front of him. He hadn't even bothered to put on his glasses.

"Is something bothering you?" Kokichi asked. He frowned a little.

"No, no," Shuichi insisted, rubbing at his eyes a bit. "It's nothing. Guess I just got lost in thought." He paused. "And this *is* work material," he added.

"Oh?" Kokichi tilted his head to the side. "Must be pretty important then, if it's the only thing you've gotten out."

"Yeah, well, it's the only lead I have right now," Shuichi sighed. "It practically confirms the girl's suicide. She was texting someone as she did it."

"Jeez…" Kokichi mumbled.

"Of course, the possibility remains that that person killed her, but it seems unlikely," Shuichi continued. "The number is saved under 'Unknown', and was on the same phone line as this one. But the person who paid for it all used cash and a fake name to do so. So I don't… know who they are. At all."

"Couldn't they have had someone else texting her while they were holding her hostage and forcing her to reply?" Kokichi asked.

"Of course," Shuichi said. "But there are absolutely no inconsistencies between the messages from that day and all the days before. The girl lived on the second floor, and her time of death was in the middle of the day when her parents were home. So, it seems unlikely." He handed the phone to Kokichi so the boy could see for himself. "In any case, the phone signal was coming from a tower in Shinjuku."

"Shinjuku?" Kokichi echoed. He looked busy reading through the

messages.

“Ah… Yeah,” Shuichi confirmed. “The victim was in Minato, so whoever was texting her, Unknown or not, definitely didn’t kill her.”

“Doesn’t this Unknown person sound sorta familiar to you?” Kokichi asked, ignoring what Shuichi was saying.

“...Huh?”

“They sound familiar,” Kokichi repeated. “Like the, you know, wording and stuff. I feel like I’ve talked to someone who talks like this before.”

Shuichi frowned, thinking back on the messages. Had they sounded familiar to him…? He supposed they did, but not in any kind of recognisable way. It was more like… they were easy to read. As if he were their good friend and they were texting *him* . It was a strange sort of feeling.

“Well, maybe it reminds me of someone I used to know,” Kokichi said with a shrug, interrupting Shuichi’s thoughts. He handed the phone back to him.

“Maybe…” Shuichi mumbled. “I was planning on going over the phone records for Unknown’s phone. Seeing which towers they were connected to and how frequently. Hopefully that will narrow down my search a bit.”

“So you’re trying to find this Unknown person, then?” Kokichi asked. “Do you really think you can do it?”

“I have to,” Shuichi told him.

Kokichi’s eyes widened a little. Shuichi was giving him a resolute stare, and he hadn’t hesitated or stuttered at all when he’d said that. He was sure of himself, Kokichi could tell.

Shuichi sighed, pulling a file folder out of his bag. “Well, thanks for the pastry. I should probably get cracking on this, though.”

“Right!” Kokichi exclaimed with a smile. “Let me know if you need my expertise again!”

Shuichi laughed a bit as Kokichi stuck his tongue out at him, flashed him a victory sign, and spun around to leave again. He was beginning

to find Kokichi's visits less annoying and more refreshing. Was it because he was getting used to him? Because he was starting to like his company? Or had Kokichi really stopped being so much of a pest?

He pushed those thoughts aside as he laid out in front of him Unknown's phone records, a blank calendar for the previous few months, and a pen. He pushed his glasses onto his face and got to work going through the phone records.

The person was primarily seen in Shibuya and Shinjuku. They were active in Shibuya during the day, and Shinjuku in the evenings, for the most part. Every Sunday, the person stayed in Shinjuku, only appearing in Minato once, the day they'd claimed to have taken the knife and delivered it to the victim. So at least that part checked out. Shuichi figured they probably worked in Shibuya and lived in Shinjuku, being off work on Sundays.

He examined the tower locations more closely. While they wouldn't give him an *incredibly* specific location, it would narrow the pool down at least a little more. His stomach sank as he realised that the tower they were connecting to in Shibuya was the one that Brioso was in range of. To think that the person was in his vicinity the whole time… It sent shivers down his spine.

But, unfortunately, that didn't tell him much. Countless people came to Shibuya to work, and since the city was so densely packed, it was still way too many people for Shuichi to reasonably sort through. He'd need to find some more information first.

Thankfully, looking at the Shinjuku tower location narrowed it down more for him. The universities were out of range of it, which ruled out a *ton* of people he wouldn't be able to get information on easily. There were only a few local residential areas within range of the tower, so he'd be able to figure out who was commuting to Shibuya from those neighbourhoods. His stomach sank as he realised he was going to need to make an upsetting amount of field trips around the city.

"What's up, Dicktective?" Kokichi asked, bringing Shuichi's attention to him.

Shuichi gave him a deadpan look. Wasn't he *just* thinking that Kokichi had gotten less annoying? Could he read his mind or something? "The cost of living."

"Yeesh, too real," Kokichi grumbled. He set down another coffee in

front of Shuichi and plopped down in the chair across from him. “You made any progress?”

Shuichi sat back a little, as Kokichi was clearly sticking around for a minute. “Yeah, actually. I’ve narrowed it down to what I hope is a fairly small amount of people.”

“Oh yeah?” Kokichi asked.

Shuichi turned his laptop to face Kokichi. “The person lives somewhere in this area of Shinjuku,” he began, pointing to the parts of the map he’d coloured in red. “And they work somewhere in this area,” he finished, pointing to the part of the map he’d coloured in blue.

Kokichi snickered.

“What?”

“Akamatsu-chan fits the bill, you know,” Kokichi said. He was teasing, of course. From what he’d gathered, Kaede was far too kind and far too smart to have been the mystery person.

“...Huh?” Shuichi blinked, then looked down at his computer, leaning in closer. Sure enough, Kaede’s apartment in Shinjuku was nestled right in one of the areas of interest. Just for a moment, his blood ran cold.

“Jeez, you look like I just told you that your mum died or something,” Kokichi said with a frown. He hadn’t meant to make Shuichi look so suddenly pale. “It was just a joke, Shu-chan! Nishishi!”

“Ah… Right,” Shuichi said, but he wrote Kaede’s name down in a notebook anyways. When Kokichi gave him a look, he added, “I know it wasn’t her. But for professionalism’s sake, I have to investigate her anyways. Just because she’s my friend doesn’t mean she’s exempt.”

“Ohh, cold!” Kokichi said with a grin.

“That goes for you, too,” Shuichi added, and Kokichi’s smile was quickly wiped off his face.

“You mean-”

“I don’t think you’ve done anything that could get you in trouble by my hands,” Shuichi interrupted, trying to clarify before Kokichi

freaked out. “But I’m warning you that you *shouldn’t* .”

“Okey dokey!” Kokichi exclaimed, seemingly already back to his usual self. In truth, Shuichi’s words had made him rather uneasy. If he was still investigating Kaede, his friend for many more years than himself, he would probably *really* put Kokichi through the wringer. The thought terrified him more than he cared to admit.

“How’s your day been?” Shuichi asked. “Have you been getting along with Momota-kun? I haven’t heard any yelling yet, at least.”

“Aww, how sweet of you!” Kokichi cooed. “Asking about my day for once…!” He smirked at Shuichi, knowing that the comment would make him feel at least a *tiny* bit guilty. “My day’s been good! But only because you’ve been here, you know!”

“Ah… That’s…”

“Momo-chan is a *pain* ,” Kokichi continued, blasting on as if he didn’t notice Shuichi’s embarrassed expression (he did). “We’ve been keeping our arguments discrete, though. If we woke up Harumaki, she’d kill me!”

“And not Momota-kun?” Shuichi asked.

“No way!” Kokichi exclaimed. “I’m pretty sure Momo-chan is the only person in the world she *wouldn’t* kill! If they’re not dating, then they’re going to be soon.”

“That’s a bold claim,” Shuichi said, taking a sip of the coffee that Kokichi had brought him. It was a latte, but he found that he’d already adjusted to tasting things that weren’t just black coffee.

“Well if you ever saw them talk to each other, you’d know what I mean,” Kokichi said. “Harumaki’s face gets all… soft! She doesn’t look like she’s ready to kill everybody when she talks to him. And even though he’s annoying as all hell, she never yells at him!”

“Hmm…” Suddenly Shuichi was overly aware of the amount of soft smiles he’d given Kokichi since Saturday. And even though *Kokichi* was annoying as hell, *he* never yelled at *him* either. Wait, did Kokichi think-?!

“What’s got you lookin’ so stressed out?” Kokichi asked. “You leave the stove on at home or something?”

Shuichi's eyes grew even wider. "D-Did I?!" he cried, looking off to the side. He couldn't recall. Surely he hadn't, right? *Right?!*

"You have to think about that?!" Kokichi asked incredulously. "Did you even use the stove this morning?! Oh my god, Shumai, how have you even survived this long?"

"Honestly, I'm not so sure myself," Shuichi replied with a sheepish grin. "And you're right. I didn't use the stove this morning. I think. Yesterday I did, yeah. Probably."

"Jeez, second guessing yourself is like your number two talent," Kokichi grumbled.

"It comes with the job, I guess," Shuichi said with a shrug. "You can never be sure of anything you… Hey wait, number *two* talent?"

"Yep! The first one is being a giant nerd!" Kokichi told him, leaning over and poking his nose.

Shuichi leaned back a bit, out of reach of Kokichi's finger. "Thanks a lot, Kokichi," he said. "Too bad *your* number one talent is distracting me while I'm trying to work."

"Hey, *you're* the one distracting *me* while I try to work!" Kokichi argued. "Keeping me hung up in this dreary old corner with you! Absolutely terrible, Blueberry-chan!"

"It's cozy…" Shuichi pouted.

"Heh… cute," Kokichi said under his breath.

"Sorry, I didn't catch that," Shuichi said with a frown.

"I didn't say anything!" Kokichi said, standing up. "You must be going crazy, Shumai! Maybe you should get your hearing checked!"

"I saw your lips move, though," Shuichi said, now even more curious as to what the boy had mumbled to himself. Something he'd want to hide…

"Those glasses must be the wrong prescription," Kokichi said dismissively. "Too bad! They make you look hot."

"...They wh-"

"In like a dumb nerdy way, though," Kokichi interrupted. "And don't

get your hopes up, pretty boy, I'm not interested."

"I didn't think you-"

"Bye, Shumai!"

"...Were."

Shuichi sighed, a little relieved that Kokichi had left before he could see how red his cheeks had gotten. Nobody had ever called him hot before, and regardless of the fact that Shuichi was in absolutely *no* way attracted to Kokichi like that, it had made him flustered. Someone thought he was… hot? People had only described him as "pretty" before; like a porcelain doll.

...Did he think Kokichi was attractive? He'd never really looked at him - like *really* looked at him - so he couldn't really say. He definitely wasn't *bad* looking, but-

"Nope! No. No way. Absolutely not," Shuichi muttered to himself, though whether he was telling himself not to think about that or answering his own question, he wasn't quite sure of.

Shuichi shook his head and cleared his mind of all thoughts of Kokichi. He had work to do, and work that wasn't just painstakingly reading over the same five documents for six hours. He didn't have time for distractions, especially when the distraction was some *boy* ! ...Jeez, what was he? A high school girl?

He quickly settled down again, sipping at his coffee as he pulled up a list of every business in the area he was looking at. There were an overwhelming amount of them, and he felt sick to his stomach knowing that he might have to spend literal days going door to door and asking for information.

To start, Shuichi took off all the businesses that were regularly closed on any day of the week except Sunday. After that, he took off the ones that wouldn't allow for an employee to be texting frequently. Custodial work for these businesses briefly flashed through his mind, but he figured that anybody working a custodial job *definitely* couldn't afford to live in the Shinjuku neighbourhoods he was looking at. He took Brioso off the list as well. Kokichi lived in Shibuya, and Makoto attended one the universities. Maki, of course, lived in the coffee shop.

The remaining businesses were split up into two groups: ones that

were open on Sundays and ones that weren't. He would start with the ones that weren't, and if he didn't find any leads from those, he'd move onto the ones that were. He couldn't rule them out completely because it was possible this person just had a Monday to Saturday shift.

By the time he'd finished, Kokichi had brought him two more coffees, then bid him farewell rather unceremoniously. He could tell that Shuichi was hard at work, and he didn't want to disturb him. Shuichi was grateful that Kokichi had graced him with the rare act of reading the mood.

Shuichi packed up his things and stretched. He technically *could* start knocking businesses off of his list - it was only 16:30 - but he figured it would be best to start fresh the next day. As he rounded the corner, he noticed that Kokichi and Kaito had been replaced by Makoto and a girl with brown hair tied up on her head that he could only assume was Hina.

"Hey, Saihara!" Makoto greeted. "New glasses?"

"Huh? Oh…" He hadn't realised he was still wearing them. "No, just forgot to take them off I guess." He laughed, but didn't remove the glasses. He didn't want to have to bother to put them back in their case in his bag.

"They look nice," Makoto said with a smile.

Shuichi wondered why it didn't send the same rush of shock through his system as when Kokichi had complimented him. Even so, he really *was* supposed to wear them all the time. Maybe he should start actually doing that...

"Anyways, this is Aoi Asahina," Makoto introduced.

"Heya!" Hina greeted with a big smile. "You can just call me Hina. It's nice to meet you, Saihara! I've heard a lot about you!"

"Ah… You have?" Shuichi asked, glancing at Makoto.

"Yep!" Hina said before Makoto could defend himself. "Makoto here always talks about how cool you are. He's studying to become a detective, you know!"

"Oh, I… didn't know that," Shuichi said. He felt a little bad for not showing any interest in Makoto's life. They weren't necessarily

friends, but perhaps he'd come off as a bit standoffish…

"It's really not a big deal," Makoto said bashfully. "Besides, there's no way I could hold a candle to Saihara."

"I'm not that special," Shuichi said with a nervous laugh.

"Have more confidence in yourselves, you two!" Hina said, pointing a finger at them. "You and Kiri will be a crime solving duo in no time!" she told Makoto.

"That's assuming I graduate," Makoto said with a laugh. He didn't look all too nervous about it though, so Shuichi figured his grades were *fine* .

"Well I look forward to potentially working with you in the future," Shuichi said with a smile.

"Yeah, you too," Makoto told him.

Hina and Makoto bid Shuichi farewell, waving as he slipped out the door of the coffee shop and into the busy city streets.

"I thought you said he was cool and collected," Hina teased, poking Makoto's side.

"W-Well most of the time he *is* !" Makoto insisted. "Well, okay, he gets kinda nervous sometimes, but something has *definitely* changed about him recently. I think it's that new coworker of mine, Ouma."

"Really? Hasn't he only worked here for, like, a week?" Hina asked.

"Yeah, but regardless, ever since he's shown up, Saihara has been… warmer?" He shook his head. "Maybe I'm just crazy."

"Well, that's alright," Hina said with a smile. "We love ya anyways!"

Makoto laughed. "Thanks, Hina." The smile lingered on his face as he looked out the window again. "Yeah… I think Ouma is changing Saihara more than the two of them know."

Day Twelve

Shuichi was, to put it simply, exhausted. He'd spent Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday going from door to door, business to business, introducing himself and requesting the names of any workers that fit the criteria he had presented. Everybody had been kind and cooperative, which he was grateful for, but quite frankly, that amount of social interaction - even if it was good - was just too much for him.

Kokichi was unquestionably disappointed that Shuichi was gone for his entire shift three days in a row. He made a point to stop by at the beginning of Kokichi's day for a coffee, but said he'd be gone for the day for work. Kaito didn't know if it was a good thing or a bad thing that Kokichi was too pouty to argue with him almost the entire time.

"Shu-chan!" Kokichi exclaimed when Shuichi had managed to drag himself through the doors of Brioso.

"Good morning, Kokichi. Momota-kun." Shuichi nodded at the two of them and noted that Kaede was still absent. Something must have been seriously wrong. She hadn't been returning any of his texts either…

"Mornin'," Kaito said with a wave.

"So are you going out all day today again?" Kokichi asked.

"Nope." Shuichi gave him a smile, and it only grew as he watched Kokichi's face light up. He'd been looking forward to telling the boy that he would be able to stay since the previous evening when he'd finally finished the job.

"Really?! You mean I finally get to spend my entire shift with my darling detective?!" Kokichi cried. He looked elated, but Shuichi could tell that it was already crossing the line of overdramatised. Probably because he didn't want Kaito to know he was genuinely pleased, even if it was obvious.

"That's right," Shuichi said, rolling his eyes. "You're welcome to join me for a while if you'd like. I'm not doing anything too serious today."

"I'll be right there!" Kokichi exclaimed, already bustling about to

make Shuichi a coffee.

Kaito watched the boy with an amused smile on his face. Even *he* had to admit that seeing Kokichi so excited was nice. It was a relief to see him back to his normal self after so many days of him sulking like a child.

It was no time at all before Kokichi and Shuichi were nestled back into the corner. Shuichi had his laptop and his notebook laid out in front of him, the coffee Kokichi made sitting slightly off to the side. Kokichi himself was curled up in the armchair across from Shuichi, cradling a cup of hot chocolate.

"So then whatcha got goin' today, Shumai?" Kokichi asked.

"I've got a list of potential suspects now, and I'll be going through them all to see if I can take any off the list," Shuichi told him. "Unfortunately, there are quite a lot of people who fit the bill." An entire page of Shuichi's notebook had been filled top to bottom with nothing but people's names.

"Oh, *that's* what you've been up to," Kokichi said, peering over at the page.

"Y-Yeah," Shuichi mumbled. "Sorry for not filling you in."

"Don't be," Kokichi said, waving him off. "It's not like you're *supposed* to be telling me what's going on with your case."

"Yeah, I'd probably get in quite a bit of trouble for showing you everything that I have, had I been working for the police department," Shuichi said with a quiet laugh.

"Well, don't worry," Kokichi told him. "I'm excellent at keeping secrets!" He gave Shuichi a grin as the boy looked up at him.

"I'm sure you are," he said offhandedly, looking back at his computer screen.

Kokichi remained silent as Shuichi started to type something. He watched as his eyes flicked back and forth, looking at something on the screen. He frowned a little, then looked back to his notebook and typed something else.

"You can keep talking, you know," Shuichi said suddenly. "I'm still paying attention. This is pretty mindless work."

“Mmmkay,” Kokichi hummed. “You’ve been wearing your glasses a lot lately. What brought that on?” It had been ever since Kokichi had told him they made him look hot. Oh, yeah. He noticed.

“Well, I’m actually supposed to wear them anyways,” Shuichi admitted. “But my vision isn’t *that* bad, so I usually don’t bother.”

Kokichi raised an eyebrow. He’d avoided the question. “You just got a sudden change of heart, then?” he asked. “Just decided to mix it up a little? You sure it wasn’t anything else?”

Shuichi’s fingers froze on his keyboard. After a brief moment, he finished what he was typing, but his hesitation hadn’t gone unnoticed by Kokichi. “Well, you *and* Naegi-kun both complimented them on Monday, so I figured maybe I’d wear them more often.”

“So it *was* because I said they made you look hot.”

Shuichi could hear the smirk in Kokichi’s voice. “Yeah. It was.”

Kokichi choked on his hot chocolate, nearly spitting it out all over his shirt. “W-What?!” He hadn’t expected such a straightforward reply. He thought Shuichi would get all flustered and deny it to hell and back. What had suddenly made him so confident?!

“Are you alright?” Shuichi asked with a laugh.

“Shut up, Blueberry-chan,” Kokichi grumbled.

“In any case, yeah,” Shuichi confirmed. “It’s nice getting compliments. Even if they’re from you.”

“Wow, so back-handed,” Kokichi sighed. “You’re so meeeaaan, Shu-chan! You’re gonna make me cry! Is that what you want? For me to cry?!”

“Of course not,” Shuichi said as he crossed a name off the list. “How about I make it up to you by inviting you over tomorrow?” What? *What?* Where had that come from? He was going to invite Kokichi over anyways, but why had he said it like *that* ?! He prayed that Kokichi wouldn’t comment on it.

Kokichi sat up straight in his chair again, looking directly at Shuichi. He was surprised at how forward he was being. Shuichi didn’t look at him as he stared, continuing on with his work. When he reached over to cross another name off, his hand was shaking slightly. Ha. Not as

confident as he seemed.

“I dunno, Shu-chan. Your apartment is probably boring!” Kokichi teased. “What do you have in there, a bunch of books and emo CDs? Probably not even that! Probably just work stuff!”

“Is that really what you think my apartment is like?” Shuichi asked, looking up to Kokichi for the first time since he’d started working.

“Well, maybe there’s a crossword book on the coffee table or something,” Kokichi said, tilting his head to the side and putting a finger on his cheek as if he were truly thinking about it. “But all you ever talk about doing is work. So I really don’t have any idea what you’re into besides that.”

“Admittedly, I do mostly… work,” Shuichi said with a sheepish grin. “But it’s true. You kind of don’t know anything about me, really.”

“What! Yes I do!” Kokichi retorted, looking back at the boy.

Shuichi raised an eyebrow. Why had he gotten so worked up over that?

“I know that you’re definitely a workaholic. You super don’t take care of yourself. I’m pretty sure you have a diagnosable caffeine addiction. You said your mum forced you to play piano when you were a kid, but I think that was a lie! The way you looked when you were playing that song you wrote made it pretty clear that you really enjoy it.

“I also know that you *suck* at Mario Kart. And you suck at Overwatch even *more* than you suck at Mario Kart! ...Actually, you kinda just suck at video games period. Oh! Except Picross! You were pretty good at that. Whenever you completed a line, you’d get this dumb smile on your face like you were so pleased with yourself.

“Hmm, let’s see… I know that you actually *enjoy* shumai, you’re a terrible cook, and you’re willing to go to great lengths to follow through with something you said you’d do. You’re dedicated and hard working, and a job isn’t done until you say it’s done, even if other people think it is. Your handwriting looks like spiderwebs, you have freckles so faint you practically can’t even see them, and your eyes are the stupidest colour I have *ever* seen. Are they green?! Are they grey?! Are they hazel?! For god’s sake, sometimes they even look *gold!*

“You also sleep talk, and you cling to anything around you while you snooze like if you don’t, you’ll drift off into space forever. You’re kinda nosy and too smart for your own good. You don’t like working with other people, but you’ve also never really had any friends, so maybe you just don’t know *how* to. You rely on yourself far too much and hold yourself to an unreasonably high standard.

“Despite the fact that you seem like a stick in the mud, you’re not afraid to break rules. When you try to use slang, you sound like a grandpa. You need to wear glasses, but you usually don’t, and isn’t that a safety hazard? You *drive* without those things on, Shumai, that’s *bad*! Especially since you don’t sleep well most the time!"

"That's-"

“I know that you’ve known Akamatsu-chan since grade school," Kokichi plowed on, ignoring Shuichi's protest. "You come to her coffee shop religiously because you want to support her. She’s your number one friend, and I’m your number three. But someday I’ll become your number one friend, just wait! I… want to be your number one friend…” Finally, he started to trail off, looking down at his lap as the last part slipped out almost unintentionally.

Shuichi stared at Kokichi with wide eyes. He’d… remembered all that? Well enough to just spit it all out right then and there? Did he just have an amazing memory, or did he… care about him? Regardless, he was more than a little impressed. He was sure Kaede knew more about him than that, and maybe even Maki did too. But Kokichi seemed like he didn’t pay attention to anything at all except himself. It made Shuichi’s chest feel warm. Which made him flustered. Which made him embarrassed. And suddenly his face was pink and he was floundering for words.

“W-Well, what’s my favourite colour?” he spluttered out, unable to form a proper response. He was a little embarrassed, but it was better than telling Kokichi exactly what he’d been thinking, which was the only other thing his frazzled brain was capable of doing.

Kokichi gave him an exasperated look. Had that seriously not been enough for him? “Black?”

“It’s silver, actually, but good guess,” Shuichi told him with a little smile. He was beginning to recover a bit more, his heart rate slowing down and his cheeks cooling off. “Still, though. I can’t believe you remember all that stuff about me. It… It…” *Means a lot to me* , he

wanted to say, but he just couldn't bring himself to do it.

"Of course I do, dumbass," Kokichi said. "You're my very best friend, you know. I remember everything you tell me about yourself."

"Your very best friend, huh?" Shuichi echoed. "Too bad. You're only my number two."

Kokichi's eyes grew a little wider, and his face quickly lit up as he nearly jumped out of his chair, leaning forwards towards Shuichi with a gigantic grin on his face. A genuine grin on his face. "Really?! Number two?!"

"Yeah, number two," Shuichi confirmed. Kokichi's excitement was endearing. Shuichi enjoyed the rare moments he got to see Kokichi's genuine emotions shining through the cracks of the mask he always put on.

Shuichi couldn't help but stare at little bit. Kokichi had leaned in really close to his face, and for some reason Shuichi couldn't look away. He examined Kokichi a little closer. The way his hair fell across his face and how soft it looked. How rich the colour of his eyes were - and how unusual the colour was, for that matter. They were… pretty. Kokichi's features were delicate, and his skin was so pale he almost looked unhealthy. He noticed with a smile that he too had the faintest of freckles dusting across his nose and cheeks.

"You gonna kiss me or what, detective?"

Kokichi cackled as Shuichi jerked backwards, blood rushing to his face as he realised just how long he'd been staring at Kokichi and just how close together the two of them were. He'd straight up been checking him out! Not intentionally or anything - it's not like he was *into* him - but regardless…! His cheeks burned even more as he realised that Kokichi *was* attractive. Upsettingly so. Had he ever thought a boy was attractive…? Had he ever consciously thought *anybody* was attractive? *Oh no…*

"Jeez, Shumai, you look like you've short circuited!" Kokichi teased. "It's alright! I'm used to people checking out my stunningly good looks~"

"I-I wasn't-! That's not-!" Despite his spluttering, Shuichi couldn't seem to convey that he *hadn't* been thinking about how attractive he was. Because he… *had* been thinking about how attractive he was.

“Mhmm, sure thing, Shu-chan,” Kokichi drawled. “It’s okay. I know I’m hard to resist! People are always telling me I’m dripping with good looks.” A lie. Nobody had ever told Kokichi he was good looking. He was usually told that he was thin. Pale. Like he never saw the light of day. Like someone could snap his arms like twigs. Occasionally people said he was cute, but it was in that condescending way that really just meant he was short. Nobody had ever found him genuinely attractive, and he couldn’t really fathom that anybody ever would.

“Well, they’re right,” Shuichi said sheepishly. He wasn’t going to go telling Kokichi that he was pretty or anything, but he wouldn’t deny credit where credit was due. He knew his cheeks were probably bright pink as he looked off to the side and avoided eye contact.

“W… What?” Kokichi didn’t even try to hide his surprise. Surely Shuichi had known he was joking, right?! Or was Shuichi joking too? No, he looked far too sincerely embarrassed for that, and he was missing the sweet little smirk that grew on his face when he teased Kokichi in that way. Shuichi… really thought he was good looking?

“I didn’t say anything,” Shuichi told him, pulling the move that Kokichi always did. He knew the boy had heard him, of course, but he wasn’t about to repeat himself.

“I know you’re lying, but I suppose I can let it slide,” Kokichi mused with a smirk. Difficult as it was to believe, Kokichi already knew that Shuichi was nothing short of sincere.

“Ah, but you never answered my question,” Shuichi reminded him, desperate for a subject change. “Did you want to come over tomorrow, or…?”

“Sure!” Kokichi replied with a grin. “What’re we gonna do? Gonna play video games and cuddle the night away again?” he asked as his grin turned mischievous.

“Y-You’re welcome to stay the night if you want, but I’m n-not so sure about that cuddling thing,” Shuichi managed to choke out. “And… Well, I don’t really have any video games.”

“You didn’t say no to cuddling!” Kokichi pointed out in a sing-song voice. “I think you were secretly into it.”

“I-!”

“And don’t worry about the video games,” Kokichi interrupted, not letting Shuichi deny it. “I’ll bring something over. And I can teach you how to cook something first, if you want!”

“I’d like that,” Shuichi said, smiling as he looked back down at his work.

“We’ll have to start off with something simple, though,” Kokichi said, tapping his finger on his chin and gazing up towards the ceiling. “Like, *super* simple. How does grilled cheese sound?”

Shuichi lifted his gaze again to give Kokichi the most unamused stare he could muster. Kokichi smirked in return, and he sighed. “I’m not an *idiot* , Kokichi, I’m just not a great cook.”

“Alright, so what’s the hardest thing you can make?” Kokichi asked. “Gimme somethin’ to work with, here!”

“I don’t know,” Shuichi mumbled, suddenly becoming very interested in the remaining twenty names on his list. “Katsudon?”

“Oh my god.”

“I tried making gyoza once too, and they weren’t… pretty. But they were edible,” Shuichi continued, heat creeping up his neck.

“‘Edible,’ he says,” Kokichi sighed with mock disappointment. “Alright, Shumai, I’ll plan something for us. Don’t you worry your pretty little head, alright?”

“You think I’m pretty?” Shuichi asked with a teasing smile. His eyes didn’t leave his laptop, even as Kokichi glanced over to lock his stare onto him.

“Sure do!” Kokichi exclaimed. “Even if you drool on me while you sleep.”

“Alright, I *know* I don’t drool in my sleep,” Shuichi protested, giving Kokichi a quick glare.

“You totally do!” Kokichi argued, a bright smile on his face. “You were snoring so loudly I thought there was a storm, and you were definitely slobbering all over me like some kind of dog!” He snickered.

“Now you’re just being ridiculous,” Shuichi said with a little laugh.

“Am not!”

“Well, I woke up in the middle of the night to find *you* clinging to my shirt like a lifeline and whining about something chasing you up a tree,” Shuichi countered.

“You’re really bad at lying, Blueberry-chan,” Kokichi said dismissively, but in truth, he probably *had* been clinging to Shuichi’s shirt like a lifeline. Just like Shuichi wrapped his arms around anything within his reach, Kokichi clung tightly to whatever shred of fabric was closest to his hands. He wondered briefly if their unconscious reasons for doing those things were the same.

“Maybe you should teach me how to lie *and* cook,” Shuichi suggested, interrupting his thoughts.

“No way,” Kokichi denied, holding up his arms and making an X in front of him. “Cooking I think I can help you with, but lying? You’re a lost cause, Shu-chan.”

“I’m that bad, huh?” Shuichi asked.

“Yep! But that’s alright. I think it’s cute,” Kokichi assured him. “Besides, isn’t it, like, your job to tell the truth all the time?”

“Not as often as you’d think,” Shuichi replied without any hesitation.

Kokichi raised an eyebrow, looking over his drink at his companion. He thought Shuichi would elaborate, but in the end, he just kept plugging along with his work. Was he joking? Just teasing him? Or was Shuichi actually a more capable liar than he previously thought?

...And why did that possibility make him so sick to his stomach?

“Ouma, there’s a line forming!” Kaito called, poking his head around the corner. “Stop flirting and come help me!”

“So pushy,” Kokichi pouted, but he got up all the same. “Well, my darling detective, it looks like our time together draws to a close! Too bad… I was having a real fun time teasing you.”

“Of course you were,” Shuichi said, looking up at him. “It’s not like you’ll be gone long, though. You’re always back to bring me more coffee sooner than I think.”

“It’s because I like you!” Kokichi told him. “Duh!”

“Well, I…” Shuichi hesitated. Did he *really* want to say it? “…I like you too.”

“I know~!” Kokichi shot him a suspicious cutesy, closed-eyed smile before disappearing to go work his *actual* job.

Shuichi rolled his eyes. Of course he’d reacted that way. He shouldn’t have overthought it so much. They were friends, after all. Obviously he liked him. So why was he so against saying so? Did he just not want to admit it? That he enjoyed the company of the boy who’d so terribly annoyed him not even two weeks prior? Or was there something else? In any case, he felt stupid for worrying about it, even if it was only briefly.

“What’re you smiling about?” Kaito asked as Kokichi slipped behind the counter again, a big grin plastered on his face.

“What, am I not allowed to be happy, Momo-chan?” he asked, purposely choosing the response he thought would make Kaito the most irritated.

“You were less annoying when you were moping about Saihara being gone,” came the prompt response.

“Hey!”

Across the coffee shop, Shuichi was already focused on getting back to work. He was disappointed that he hadn’t been able to cross off many names, but he kind of figured it would come to that. He had quickly looked up the suspects on social media, using their posts to determine if they had been in locations other than where Unknown was at any time. He confirmed the existence of those events or activities, and if everything checked out, he’d cross that person off the list.

Kokichi had dropped by to bring him a couple more coffees while he worked, but both times he left in somewhat of a hurry. Whether that was because he was busy himself or he wanted to leave him be, Shuichi didn’t know. He was too absorbed in his own work to even think about asking.

Since the previous night, when he’d started, he’d gotten his list down from about seventy to just shy of sixty. Fifty eight people was a pretty manageable amount of phone records to go through, but he wasn’t exactly looking forward to it.

With a sigh, he packed up his things again and stood to stretch. There

wasn't much he could do other than to request the phone records for all of his suspects, and he couldn't do that from the coffee shop. He'd go get them, maybe go through a few at his office, then leave all his work there for the weekend.

"Leaving already?" Kokichi whined, catching sight of Shuichi approaching the counter. "You were only here for a few hours, though! I still have over two hours left in my shift, you know." He pouted.

"I know," Shuichi said with an eye roll. "You'll live. I have to get some stuff done elsewhere, otherwise I'd stay longer."

"You'd better make this up to me, Shumai! Leaving me all alone with Momo-chan so many times this week!" Kokichi turned away from him slightly, crossing his arms and sticking his nose up in the air.

"Whatever you want," Shuichi said dismissively. "But I'll take a drink to go, if you wouldn't mind. Anything is fine."

"Anything, huh?" Kokichi asked, a smirk growing on his face.

"Something *palatable* ," Shuichi revised, but Kokichi was already working on something.

In no time at all, Kokichi was sliding something across the counter that smelled suspiciously of peppermint, even though they were currently in the midst of spring. Regardless, Shuichi took it with a smile and tossed a few yen coins into the tip jar.

"For my number two and three friends," he said with a smile before walking out into the bright afternoon sun.

Kokichi nudged Kaito with his elbow. Kaito ignored him. Kokichi nudged him again. And again. And again.

"What?" Kaito finally sighed, glaring down at the boy.

"I'm his number two friend, ya know," Kokichi boasted.

Kaito groaned. "Of course you are."

"You've been demoted!"

"I don't *care* ."

Kokichi smiled to himself as he turned away from Kaito. Shuichi's

second best friend, huh? It made his heart swell in a way he couldn't describe. Or perhaps in a way he didn't *want* to describe. He hadn't been one of someone's best friends in so long that he'd forgotten how warm it made him feel. It terrified him.

But, as he thought of Shuichi and how *good* he felt when he was around him, he decided that, despite his fear, being friends with Shuichi was worth it.

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